THE NEW PLUTARCH

HAROUN ALRASCHID

THE NEW PLUTARCH:

Lives of Men and Women of Action.

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HAROUN ALRASCHID

CALIPH OF BAGDAD

BY

E. H. PALMER, M.A.

LORD ALMONER'S PROFESSOR OF ARABIC IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Sole star of all that place and time,
I saw him—in his golden prime,
THE GOOD HAROUN ALRASCHID.
TENNYSON.

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EDITORS' PREFACE.

THE name of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid is inseparably associated with the most charming collection of stories ever invented for the solace and delight of mankind. Whether there ever was any "Aaron the Just" in the flesh—whether he is not as legendary as King Arthur—it seldom occurs to the ordinary reader to inquire. The stories belong to all time and to no time. The king no doubt still wanders incognito in the streets of Bagdad; one-eyed Calendars still tell their tales; fishermen continue to delude the stupid genie; Aladdin goes on rubbing his lamp. The great Caliph has nothing to do with reality; his Bagdad is a city which may be on the Euphrates or on any other river, provided it be a stately city by a stately river; he, his empire, his crown, his city, his palace, his people, his officers, his harem, belong all alike to Fableland, where everybody has been hitherto content to leave them.

When Professor Palmer, therefore, being consulted as to a worthy representative of Islam for this series of illustrious men of all time, proposed the good Haroun Alraschid, one experienced at once that

curiosity which attaches to a thing entirely new, and yet strangely familiar. The Caliphate, the successors of the Prophet, the great Empire of the East, the man himself, all became at once endowed with life and reality. The Professor went on to explain that not only was the subject full of interest, but that there were boundless stores of Arabic histories from which to draw, and that his chief difficulty would be to compress within our modest limits a historical account of the Empire and the King, with selections from the stories which surround his name.

The following pages are the result of his labours. The introductory chapter is an account of the rise and growth of the Empire; the Caliph of real history follows, an Eastern autocrat, capricious, cruel, and vindictive, yet of a *bon naturel.* In the "Caliph of legend," the Author shows how not only stories have gathered round his name more thickly than round that of the great Carl, or Frederick Redbeard, but also how the memory of the man is preserved in anecdotes which bear upon themselves the stamp of truth. It is therefore with great satisfaction that we present the readers of the "New Plutarch" with a restoration to life, so to speak, of one who has too long been little better than a dweller in the realms of fiction. For the first time, the great Caliph of legend is "done into English" as a Caliph of history and reality.

W. J. B.
W. B.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE RISE OF THE CALIPHATE.

THE ancient Empire of Persia was tottering to its fall, the great and holy Roman Empire had well-nigh run its course, when Mohammed, with true prophetic inspiration — or, what is more, with true political instinct—foretold to the Arabians that they should inherit the glories of the dying empires, and should themselves, for the same faults, ultimately share their fate.

"Do they not see how many a generation we have destroyed before them, whom we had settled on the earth as we have not settled for you, and sent the rain of heaven on them in copious showers, and made the waters flow beneath them? Then we destroyed them for their sins, and raised up other generations after them."—*Koran*, vi. 6.

I propose, in the following pages, to show what the Mohammedan empire was at the culminating point of its greatness, by sketching the career of the most illustrious of its sovereigns, and the one most familiar to European readers—to describe, in short,

——— the golden prime
Of good Haroun Alraschid.

It will, however, be necessary first to learn, as briefly as possible, in what manner and through what means the Mohammedan power had its rise and origin.

The Arabs, in and before Mohammed's time, were a brave and vigorous race, preserving almost un-

changed the habits and mode of life of the patriarchal age. Living in the pure and invigorating air of the desert, far from the turmoil of men and cities; unacquainted with luxury, and possessing in his camels, sheep, and tents all that he absolutely required for his subsistence, the Arab was, and still is, a free, simple, vigorous child of nature. Like all peoples who live in constant communion with nature, poetry was a passion as well as an innate talent with him, and by furnishing him with an easy vehicle for the recording of thoughts and events, by giving him in fact a literature, although an unwritten one, redeemed him from many of the faults of unlettered savagery. "The Arabs' registers are the verses of their bards," says their own proverb, and the number of these which have been preserved afford invaluable materials for the study of their history and character. Their poetry was the natural outcome of their mode of existence, and the very metres and rhythms which they employ breathe the desert air. Just as the Scandinavian poet, in his daily life amidst brawling torrents and dashing cascades, threw his thoughts insensibly into language that flowed in harmony with these voices of nature around him; so the Arab, in the stillness of the desert, thought aloud as he journeyed on, while his thoughts insensibly fell into language whose rhythm was guided by the pace of his camel or himself.

So passionately fond of liberty is the Arab, that he will not brook the trammels of government or even of society. The individual Bedawi bows to no authority but his own will; and if a tribe acknowledge a Sheikh or elder as its head, it promises no allegiance to him as ruler or lord, but only cedes to him the right of representing it in its dealings with strangers, and gives him the somewhat equivocal privilege of occupying the most exposed part of the

camp, and of entertaining all comers at his own expense. A certain strong feeling of clanship among the members of individual tribes, an irrepressible love of plunder and freebooting, leading to constant petty wars and prolonged vendettas, and a superstitious belief in a debased form of Sabæanism, were the chief characteristics of the people in the midst of whom Mohammed was born.

The requirements of commerce necessitated some general gatherings of the tribes, and the territory of Mecca, where was situated the most honoured shrine of Sabæan worship, was naturally the locality in which they would occur. Accordingly, an annual fair was held at Ocadh, where literary contests also took place; and these, like the Olympic games amongst the Greeks, served to keep alive a certain feeling of national unity among the different tribes. Two results followed from this state of things, which have an important bearing on the success of Mohammed's mission. In the first place, the tribe of the Koreish, from which he sprung, were located on the site of the Ka'abeh, the chief temple of national worship just referred to, and they therefore became the natural guardians of the sacred edifice, and so acquired a kind of prescriptive superiority over other tribes. Secondly, as all the tribes met in the territory of the Koreish to try their respective skill in poetry and oratory, the language of this particular tribe became necessarily the standard dialect, and absorbed into itself many of the idioms and locutions of the rest. Thus we see that local, tribal, and social circumstances were all in favour of the development of any great idea originating with the Koreish.

So far, the picture of the Arab is a bright and favourable one; but there is, unfortunately, a dark side to it. Morally and intellectually, they were in a

state of revolting barbarism; the primitive simplicity of Sabæanism—the worship of the Hosts of Heaven—had degenerated into a gloomy and idolatrous polytheism; drunkenness, gambling, divination by arrows, polygamy, murder, and worse vices were terribly rife amongst them.

Amongst their other savage practices, that of burying their female children alive was perhaps the worst. Even at the present day, female children are considered rather a disgrace than a blessing by the Bedawi Arabs, and a father never counts them in enumerating his offspring. Before Mohammed's time, the same dislike existed in a more repulsive form still, and this practice of burying daughters alive—*wa'd al benát*, as it was called—was very prevalent. "The best son-in-law is the grave," said one of their own proverbs, and the father was in most cases the murderer. It is narrated of one chief, Othman, that he never shed tears except on one occasion, when his little daughter, whom he was burying alive, wiped the grave-dust from his beard. Against this inhuman practice Mohammed directed all the thunders of his eloquent indignation, and set before their eyes the terrors of the last day, "when the female child that hath been buried alive shall be asked for what crime she was put to death."

The Ka'abeh, their chief sanctuary, contained no fewer than three hundred and fifty idols; amongst them the famous black stone, said to have fallen from heaven, and to have been originally white, though now blackened by the kisses of devout but sinful mortals.

The guardianship of the Ka'abeh and the chieftainship of the Koreish tribe were vested in Abd Menaf,[1]

[1] See Genealogy.

and would in the ordinary course of things have descended to his eldest son, Abd Shems. His second son Hashim, however, having obtained a victory over an invading Abyssinian army, was promoted to the office, and a deadly rivalry henceforth existed between the two families; from his son Ommaiyeh were descended the Ommiade caliphs of Damascus. Hashim's son, Abd al Muttaleb, had three sons—Abdallah, the father of the Prophet Mohammed; Abbas, the progenitor of the Abbaside caliphs; and Abu Talib, the father of Ali, who married Mohammed's daughter Fatima, from whom sprang the Fatemite and Alawi caliphs, who ruled in Egypt and Africa.

At Mohammed's death, the tribes of Arabia would have relapsed into their former anarchy, had it not been for the wisdom and energy of Omar, one of the staunchest supporters of El Islam, and a father-in-law of the Prophet. There were four claimants for the Caliphate — Ali, first cousin to Mohammed, and husband of the latter's youngest daughter Fatima; Abu Bekr, father of Mohammed's favourite wife Ayesha; Omar, whom we have just mentioned, father of Hafsa, another of his wives; and Othman, a member of the house of Ommaiyeh. Othman had, however, embraced Islam and married two of the Prophet's daughters. Ali was undoubtedly the lawful successor, but as he had on one occasion mortally offended Ayesha by listening to a charge of incontinence that had been brought against her, she used all her influence to prevent his accession, and the house of Ommaiyeh strenuously supported her opposition. An immediate rupture was avoided by the election of Abu Bekr, at whose death Omar was, by the intrigues of Ayesha, invested with the office of Caliph, and, when Omar died, Othman was elected, as Ali refused to subscribe to the conditions imposed upon him, that

he should govern according to the Koran and the "Traditions." Ali's reply is remarkable: he declared his readiness to govern according to the Koran, but would not be bound by the "Traditions of the Elders," as he called them; thus giving contemporaneous evidence that the "Sunna," or "Traditions," are not, as the sect called Sunnis pretend, composed of the personal sayings of Mohammed, but represent the traditional legal wisdom of Arabia, which has received the sanction of Mohammed's name. This is a very important point to bear in mind, as it accounts to a great extent for the antipathy of the Persians to the Sunnite creed. The Koran itself is, indeed, less the invention or conception of Mohammed, than a collection of legends and moral axioms borrowed from desert lore and couched in the language and rhythm of desert eloquence, but adorned with the additional charm of enthusiasm. Had it been merely Mohammed's own invented discourses, bearing only the impress of his personal style, the Koran could never have appealed with so much success to every Arab-speaking race as such a miracle of eloquence that its very beauty is divine; nor would it, as it has done, have formed the recognised standard of literary elegance and grandeur. Ali's reply, then, contained the whole gist of the dispute between Shiah and Sunni. The former will accept the Koran, the legal code of which is vague and incomplete, and which contains only one uncompromising dogma—that of the unity of God—which he can and does refine away. But, on the other hand, he will not acknowledge the Sunna, which hampers him at every step with alien ordinances and with ceremonies foreign to his nature and his national traditions.

Othman's first act, on being promoted to the chief

command in El Islam, was to fill all the most important posts with members of the House of Ommaiyeh, Moawiyeh, son of Abu Sofyan, being made Governor of Syria. Othman was at length assassinated, and Ali elected, this time unconditionally, to the Caliphate. He at once recalled Moawiyeh, who refused to obey, and, backed by the influence of Ayesha, claimed the Caliphate for himself. A severe contest followed between the armies of Ali and Moawiyeh, in which the former was at first successful. He was, however, compelled by the intrigues of Amrou, the general who had conquered Egypt, to submit his own claims and those of Moawiyeh to arbitration, instead of taking full advantage of his military success. Arrived at Kufa, 12,000 of Ali's followers took offence at the proposed arbitration and deserted, which defection originated the sect of Kharegites or Separatists, "who reject the lawful government established by public consent." Three of these deserters, named Barak, Amrou, and Abdarrahman, planned a conspiracy to assassinate, on one and the same day, Ali, Moawiyeh, and Amrou, whose quarrels they considered had caused all the troubles and dissensions in Islam. Barak went to Damascus, and attacked Moawiyeh in the mosque during the Friday prayers, but without fatal results. Amrou, at the same hour, entered the Mosque of Cairo and slew Karija, whom he mistook for Amrou, the general. Abdarrahman, the third conspirator, repaired to Kufa, where the Caliph was felled to the ground by a sword-cut on the head as he was entering the mosque (A.D. 660). He was buried about five miles from Kufa, and in later times a magnificent mausoleum was erected over the spot, which became the favourite resort of Shiah pilgrims, and the site of the city of Meshed Ali, or "Ali's shrine." On Ali's death, his eldest son Hasan

was elected Caliph, but resigned the office to Moawiyeh, on the understanding that he should again succeed at the latter's decease. Moawiyeh, however, had other designs in view, and determined that his own son Yezid should succeed him. At Moawiyeh's instigation, Hasan was foully murdered by his own wife, eight years after his father's death, and Ayesha, the evil genius of Ali's family, herself died some years after—murdered, it is said, by her protégé Moawiyeh. On Moawiyeh's death, his son Yezid succeeded him without election, and the Ommiade dynasty thus became established on the throne of the Caliphate. Yezid had hardly assumed the office, when the partisans of Ali's family prepared to revolt, and Husain, Ali's surviving son, who was then at Mecca, was secretly invited to Kufa to place himself at the head of the party. Yezid, however, had timely warning of the intended rising, and replaced the then governor of Kufa by the stern and uncompromising Obeidallah, who seized on Muslim, the envoy of Husain, and on Hani, in whose house he had been concealed; and when a crowd collected about the Palace, clamouring for the release of the prisoners, ordered their heads to be struck off and thrown down to the assembled multitude. As Husain himself arrived on the borders of Babylonia, he was met by Harro with a company of horse. This man told him that he had Obeidallah's orders to bring him to Kufa, and on Husain's refusing to accompany him, he allowed him to choose any road that led to Kufa, and retreated his force for the purpose of facilitating the movement. After riding through the night, a horseman met them, and delivered instructions to Harro that he was to lead Husain into an open and undefended place until the Syrian army came up and surrounded them. The next day Amer arrived with

4000 men from Kufa, and, on Obeidallah's orders, cut off Husain's retreat on the plain of Kerbela by the River Euphrates, surrounded his camp, and demanded his unconditional surrender. His refusal was followed by a murderous attack from the enemy, which Husain and his few followers for some time repelled, but which ended in their complete annihilation.

The great secret of Mohammed's success, and of the rapid military and religious development of Islam, lay in the fact that he, for the first time in their history, banded together the Arab tribes in one confederation, taught them that they possessed a national unity, and made them lay aside their petty feuds and jealousies.

The first four, or orthodox Caliphs, as the Mohammedans call them, though exercising a perfectly absolute authority, never threw aside the simple manners and habits of a desert sheikh. Dressed in a coarse *abba*, or loose hair-cloth cloak, or wearing a rude sheepskin mantle over his shoulders, and with leathern sandals on his feet, the "Prince of the Faithful" walked unattended about the market-place, and listened to complaints of and criticisms on his rule, and often delivered in rude offensive terms.

Their position, as the name Caliph (or, more correctly, Khalífeh) implies, was strictly that of "Successor" to the Prophet, and their functions were therefore ecclesiastical as well as military. Indeed, they used to lead the prayers of the worshippers in person on Fridays in the principal mosque of the capital.

The following anecdote will illustrate the simplicity of their lives and the relations they held towards their followers:—On one occasion the Caliph Omar ibn el Khattab had received a present from Yemen of some fine striped cloth, which he distributed amongst

his followers. On the next day, when he ascended the pulpit and exhorted the congregation to fight against the infidels, one man rose and said, "I will neither listen nor obey!" "Why not?" asked the Caliph. "Because," said he, "I see you wearing a shirt of that stuff from Yemen, and unless you had taken more than your share, such a tall man as you are would not have found it enough." Omar called upon his son Abdallah to clear him from the unjust suspicion, which he did by telling the congregation that he had himself given a piece from his own share of the cloth to make up the deficiency in his father's portion.

Led by such chiefs, and animated by the intense enthusiasm and religious fervour which Mohammed had inspired, the armies of Islam swept irresistibly over Asia, and the vast empire of the Khosroes fell almost without a struggle. At first, with their iconoclastic instincts and their love of plunder, they brought nothing but ruin and devastation in their train, and the treasures of art and literature were dispersed or destroyed as soon as they fell into their hands. Nor had they at first any better idea of taking advantage of their conquests than the old Arab plan of confiscating the portable property of, and imposing a tax on, the conquered, offering the choice of Islam or death to those who either could not or would not pay it. Soon, however, the exigencies of their widely extended dominions required more settled and elaborate government; the aid of Greeks and Persians was called in to assist the Arab generals and governors, and the desert warriors began gradually to adapt themselves to the civilisation around them. Arts, sciences, and literature began once more to take their former place under the Moslem rule, but we must not forget, as so many

historians seem to do, that none of these blessings owe more to the Arabs than the permission to exist. It is solely to Persian and Greek influence that they survived; the simple but barbarous Caliphs, during the first years of the empire, left the whole of the administration of the provinces in native hands to such an extent that, for some time, Greek was the language in which the official acts of the Arab rulers were recorded. Persian artists designed and decorated their mosques and palaces; the gardens of Shiraz, and not the rude rocks of the desert, suggested the beautiful forms of tracery that we are accustomed to call Arabesque; the science and philosophy were all either Indian or Greek. In fact, it was Aryan civilisation, that would not be crushed out by rude invasion; it was history repeating itself, and

> "Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes
> Tetulit agresti Latio."

Yezid's succession to the Caliphate on the death of his father Moawiyeh was not distasteful to the partisans of Ali's family alone. In Mecca resided Abdallah ibn Zobeir, a man with many claims to the affection and reverence of the faithful. His father, Zobeir, had been one of the earliest converts to Islam, a cousin and intimate friend of the prophet, and a successful general who had mainly contributed to the conquest of Africa, and had almost won Byzantium for the Moslem arms: the son, Abdallah, was born at Medina during Mohammed's sojourn there, and had been nursed by the Prophet himself, with whom he was a great favourite. On the death of Husain, Abdallah was saluted Caliph by the Meccans; Medina followed shortly after, and in a little time all Hejjáz acknowledged his authority. Medina was sacked by the army which Yezid had sent against it,

but Mecca still held out, until the death of the Caliph put an end to the siege.

Yezid presented a great contrast to his simple and severe predecessors. During h s reign, which lasted only three years and six months, he shocked the Moslem world by his excesses, his open indulgence in wine, and his poetry, in which he ridiculed the most sacred tenets of his faith, and launched into extravagant praises of all that it forbade.

His son Moawiyeh was a mere boy when his father died. In a few months he begged to be relieved of the burden of sovereignty, which he felt to be too great for him, and died (some say poisoned) in retirement shortly afterwards.

Abdallah ibn Zobeir failed to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by Yezid's death, and the chiefs of the house of Ommaiyeh chose Merwán, a friend and favourite of the Caliph Othman, as the successor to the throne. He was murdered by his wife after a short reign of nine months, during which the empire was distracted by the sanguinary conflicts of the rival parties contending for power. Besides the son of Zobeir at Mecca, there were also in the field the partisans of Ali at Kufa and the Kharegites, or Separatists, who had deserted Ali at Siffín. Nor were these the only elements of discord, for a disturbing cause existed in Islam, almost as potent as the racial hatred between the Arabs and the Persians; this was the antagonism between the purely nomadic tribes, who claimed Modhar for their sire—and to whom the Koreish, although settled at Mecca, belonged—and the more civilised tribes of Yemen. Between these two parties an ancient and irreconcilable feud existed, and although the enthusiasm of religion and the lust of conquest banded them together for a time, their smothered hatred was

always ready to burst out into flame. Another fertile source of danger to the empire was the military power with which the governors of provinces were armed, and which often enabled and tempted them to withstand the Caliph's authority. Thus religious fanaticism, racial hatred, tribal feuds, family quarrels, and private ambition were all together threatening to undermine the magnificent structure which the easy victories of Mohammed and his successors had built up.

The Ommiade family had owed its success to the severe virtues and the unflinching courage inherent in the chiefs of the desert; but prosperity, by destroying the necessity for the exercise of these virtues and by effacing their primitive simplicity, hastened their fall.

Abd el Melik, Merwán's son, who succeeded him, did something to stem the tide of ruin. He was a prince of great ability and determination, and knew how to consolidate his authority, and establish it on a firmer basis. The language of the official documents in which the affairs of the empire were recorded was changed from Persian to Arabic; the freedom of intercourse which the former Caliphs had allowed their subjects was jealously repressed by him; the Arabian provinces were brought under his rule; and El Hejjáz, one of the most stern and bloodthirsty commanders that Arab history records, having been sent by him to Mecca, conquered the city and put the usurper, Abdallah ibn Zobeir, to death (A D. 692).

Before Abd el Melik ascended the throne, he had pursued theological studies at Medina with such assiduity that he acquired the *sobriquet* of the "Mosque Pigeon," since, like those birds, he scarcely ever quitted the holy edifice, but remained there day and night reading the Koran. When news was

brought him of his father's death and his own succession, he shut up the volume and said, "Here you and I part!" after which he occupied himself entirely with affairs of state.

His greatest achievement was the building of the magnificent Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem, which work, though undertaken chiefly through political exigencies, and in order to divert men from the pilgrimage to Mecca, the capital of his rival Abdallah ibn Zobeir, remains a lasting memorial of his munificence.

At Abd el Melik's death, the Caliphate passed into the hands of his eldest son, Walíd, with a reversion, in case of his death, to his second son, Suleiman. Walíd wished to set aside this arrangement in favour of his own son Abd el Aziz, and, with the assistance of El Hejjáz and other chiefs, planned to obtain from his brother a formal renunciation of his rights of succession. Suleiman sought the aid of the Yemeni chiefs, and the slumbering passions of the two factions being aroused, a series of revolutions and civil wars commenced, which ultimately resulted in the downfall of the Ommiade dynasty.

In A.D. 715 Walíd died, and was succeeded by his brother Suleiman. He, like his brother, had wished one of his own sons to succeed him, but yielded to the advice of his counsellors, and left sealed instructions that Omar ibn Abd el Aziz, a grandson of Merwán, should be proclaimed Caliph at his death, which was accordingly done.

During the reigns of Abd el Melik and Walíd the limits of the empire were vastly extended by a continued series of conquests, Spain, India, and Central Asia being included in their dominions. Arabia had been quieted by the death of Abdallah ibn Zobeir and the taking of Mecca. El Hejjáz, who had

accomplished the task, ruled the turbulent provinces of Irak with an iron hand.

Walíd was the last great monarch of the Ommiade dynasty. Yezid II., who succeeded him, was a prince of frivolous character, and although he, or rather his brother Maslamah, succeeded in repressing a formidable revolt of the Yemeni faction, the slaughter with which the victory was accompanied only increased the latent hatred of the disaffected tribes. He died in A.D. 723, and was succeeded on the throne by his brother Hisham, who, by appointing Yemeni nobles as lieutenants to the various provinces, in place of the members of his own family, who had hitherto almost exclusively held these offices, succeeded in quieting at least a portion of his dominions for a time, although his parsimony alienated the affections of his subjects. Hisham died in 743, and was followed by his nephew, Walíd II., a debauched and extravagant prince, who commenced his career by squandering the treasures which his predecessor had saved. An anecdote is related of him, that on one occasion he consulted the Koran by the species of divination practised in the middle ages with a volume of Virgil, and called *Sortes Virgilianæ*, and lit upon the passage, "Disappointed shall be every rebel tyrant." In a rage he threw the sacred volume on the ground, and cried in impromptu verse—

"Me as a 'rebel tyrant' wouldst thou then affright?
Yea! for I am a rebel tyrant—thou art right!
And when in judgment thou before the Lord shalt stand,
Say then that thou wert torn thus by Walíd's right hand!"

A short time afterwards, say the historians, he was murdered.

The popularity which the extravagance of Walíd II. had gained for him also induced him to try the

dangerous experiment of proclaiming one of his sons, then mere children, his successor. The sons of Hisham and of Walíd I. naturally resisted this, and began to conspire against his authority. About the same time he committed a still greater mistake, and allowed one of the most popular leaders of the Yemenis, and formerly governor of Irak under Walíd I., who was residing peaceably at Damascus, to be given up to, and put to death by, a political opponent. The Yemeni tribes rose like a man to avenge the death of their clansman, and with Yezid, a son of Walíd I., at their head, attacked and slew the Caliph. This Yezid (III.) was then proclaimed in his stead, but only reigned six months. He died in 744, and was succeeded by Merwán II., a grandson of the first Caliph of that name, who had been governor of Armenia and Azerbaijan. With a large army of disciplined soldiers, composed almost entirely of Modharite Arabs, he easily defeated a larger force of untrained Yemenites who had proclaimed Ibrahím, Yezid's brother, Caliph, and assumed the chief power. Merwán's strong partiality for his own (the Modhar) clan raised a storm of disaffection amongst the Yemeni Arabs; the other factions took advantage of the opportunity, and simultaneous revolutions broke out all over the empire. His prompt and vigorous measures soon quieted Syria. Arabia, which had been overrun by the Kharegites, was almost recovered, when a fresh outbreak occurred which changed the whole current of events.

We have hitherto not spoken much of a branch of Mohammed's family who were destined to play a very great *rôle* in the drama of Islam—Abd al Muttaleb's other son, Abbas, the prophet's uncle. Although at first he refused to embrace the new faith, Islam, he ultimately gave in his adherence

to it, and his son Abdallah, better known as Ibn Abbas, became one of the lights of religion, and the greatest authority for the reading and interpretation of the Koran. He left several children, but only the youngest of them, Ali, had issue, and it was his son Abdallah who first aspired to the Caliphate, and who created the Abbaside party.

Mohammed made common cause with the descendants of Ali ibn Abi Talib, succeeded in getting himself acknowledged Imám, or spiritual head of the Church, and at once commenced the dissemination of his doctrines in Persia. Here everything was ripe for revolt: the conquering Arabs lived as a military caste amongst the vanquished Persians, treating them with ignominy, holding themselves exclusively aloof from them, and in every way wounding their proud and sensitive natures. Those who had ostensibly professed Islam had, as we have seen, warmly espoused the cause of Ali and his family, and it is not to be wondered at that the Abbaside emissaries found ready listeners amongst the former subjects of the Sassanian kings. Mohammed ibn Abbas died in 742, but his son Ibrahím was acknowledged as Imám, and the secret propaganda still continued as active as ever. The moment was favourable to a rising, for the Modhari and Yemeni factions were in constant and open conflict throughout the empire, especially in Khorassan. Ibrahím associated himself with one Abu Moslem, a brilliant and most determined soldier, of uncertain origin, but of great attachment to the house of Abbas, and appointed him his agent in Khorassan, in which province he had been born. About the same time a grandson of Zein el Abidin, the son of Husain, and the rightful Imám, was murdered; Abu Moslem had

the corpse buried, and ordered all his followers to wear black, and himself carried a black standard, as a token of their grief for the loss of their spiritual chief. From this day black was adopted as the colours of the Abbasides. At once the greater part of the population of Khorassan appeared in the mourning hue, showing how successful the propaganda had been; and Abu Moslem, finding himself at the head of a sufficiently large army, broke out openly into revolt. He next sent an army into Irak. Kufa received him with open arms, expecting the house of Ali to be restored. In the meantime a letter from Abu Moslem to Ibrahím having been intercepted by Merwán, the Imám was killed; not, however, before he had contrived to send a written document appointing his brother Abdallah his successor. The latter was proclaimed Caliph at Kufa; and although Merwán made a desperate resistance, he was beaten and hunted to death in Upper Egypt. The new Caliph inaugurated his reign by a series of cruel massacres, every member or partisan of the Ommiade family being put to death. On one occasion, having invited over seventy of them to his palace, and promised them an amnesty, he caused them to be treacherously murdered; and ordering *nita's*, or leathern trays used in executions, to be spread over their bodies, mounted on the top of the ghastly pile and ate his meal, jeering the while at the death groans that came from some of his still gasping victims. Es Saffáh, "the shedder of blood," as he was called, reigned a little over four years, when he died in 753 A.D., and was succeeded by his brother Abu Jaafer, surnamed Mansúr.

Persian influence was now paramount at Court, and Abu Moslem, the Khorassani, to whom the Abbasides owed their accession to power, was the most powerful

and influential man in the kingdom. This was distasteful to the arrogant Arabs, and the Caliph himself began to scheme how he could rid himself of the founder of the fortunes of his race. With great difficulty and consummate perjury he at last induced the general to visit him, entertained him hospitably for some days to lull his suspicions, and when the opportunity offered, had him barbarously murdered.

El Mansúr, a morose and avaricious prince, died in 760, and was succeeded by his son Mohammed, surnamed El Mehdi. He was the very reverse of his father in disposition; his vizier and principal adviser was Ya'kub ibn Dáúd, a Persian by birth and a Shiah by creed. Under his administration the Persians rose higher than ever in importance, and their indifference and even hostility to the religion of Islam was openly displayed. The vizier was, however, disgraced for neglecting to put a member of Ali's family to death, and was thrown into a dungeon, from which he was only released in the reign of Haroun Alraschid.

In El Mehdi's reign appeared the celebrated impostor Al Mukanna, better known as "the Veiled Prophet of Khorassan." Mehdi died in 786, bequeathing the succession to his eldest son El Hadi, and after the death of the latter, to his other son Alraschid.

HAROUN ALRASCHID.

CHAPTER I.

HAROUN'S ACCESSION.

HAROUN ALRASCHID, more properly written Harún er Rashíd, "Aaron the Orthodox," was the fifth of the Abbaside caliphs of Bagdad. His full name was Harún 'bn Mohammed ibn Abdallah ibn Mohammed ibn Ali 'bn 'Abdallah ibn Abbas. He was born at Ray the last day of Dhi 'l Hejjah, 145 A.H. (20th March, 763 A.D.), according to some accounts, and according to others, 1st Moharrem, 149 A.H. (15th Feb., 766 A.D.)

Haroun was twenty-two years old when he ascended the throne. His biographers unanimously speak of him as "the most accomplished, eloquent, and generous of the Caliphs;" but though his name is a household word, and few figures stand out more grandly prominent in the history of their times, little

is really popularly known about his private life and personal history.

I shall endeavour in the following sketch to paint not only the monarch but the man; the emperor and the adventurous prince, whose incognito strolls about Bagdad furnish some of the most humorous incidents of the "Arabian Nights."

Imbued with that strict devotional spirit which is so characteristic of the true Mohammedans, and which makes their religion enter into every phase of their thought and mingle with every incident of their daily life, Haroun Alraschid was unremitting in the ceremonial observances of his faith.

Every alternate year, with very few exceptions, he made the pilgrimage to Mecca, or he prosecuted a "Holy War" against the enemies of Islam. His pilgrimages were always performed on foot, and when we consider the distance between Bagdad and Mecca, and the inhospitable nature of the arid desert through which he had to travel, this fact alone will give some idea of the indomitable energy and perseverance of his character. He was the only Caliph who ever imposed upon himself so austere a duty, and he was perhaps the only one who ever condemned himself to the performance of a hundred prostrations with his daily prayers. Upon his pilgrimages he was always accompanied by a hundred doctors learned in the law, together with their sons; and in the years that he

did not visit Mecca himself, he performed the pilgrimage vicariously, sending three hundred men for that purpose at his own expense, and providing them with magnificent equipments for the journey. His piety was no doubt sincere, but there is good reason to believe that it was in a great measure due to his desire to

> "Compound for sins he was inclined to,
> By damning those he had no mind to."

Save in his lavish generosity, he much resembled his predecessor, Mansúr, and, like him, took great delight in literature, especially poetry, and in the society of learned men.

It is related that Haroun Alraschid one day gave a great entertainment, to which Abu 'Atáhíyeh, a blind poet, was invited. After dinner the Caliph said to the poet, "Give us a description of the happiness and prosperity which we enjoy." Whereupon Abu 'Atáhíyeh sang :—

> "Right happy may thy life be made,
> Safe in the lofty castle's shade !"——

"Bravo !" said Haroun.

> "And every morn and eve may all
> Thy every slightest wish forestall !"——

"Excellent !" said the Commander of the Faithful.

> "But when thy latest struggling sighs,
> With rattlings in the breast arise,
> Then shalt thou of a surety know
> 'Tis all deception here below !"

On hearing this the Caliph burst into tears, and El Fadhl, the son of Yahya the Grand Vizier, of whom we shall have a great deal to say in the course of our narrative, turned to the poet, and said, in a tone of remonstrance—"The Commander of the Faithful sent for you to amuse him, and you have only made him sad." "Nay," said Alraschid, "leave him alone; he only saw that we were growing blind, and did not wish to make us more so."

Haroun was remarkable for the deference which he paid to men of letters. Abu Mu'áwiyeh, a learned doctor, and also blind, was one day dining with the Caliph, when some one brought round a basin and ewer, and poured water on his hands, after the Eastern fashion. Abu Mu'áwiyeh, being blind, did not of course perceive who it was that had paid him this attention, until Haroun Alraschid owned that he himself had waited on him. "Oh, Commander of the Faithful!" exclaimed the *savant*, "I suppose you do this by way of showing honour to learning!" "Just so," replied the Caliph.

Alraschid owed his own succession to the throne entirely to the prudence and sagacity of Yahya 'bn Khalid ibn Barmek, his secretary, and afterwards his Grand Vizier when Caliph. According to the Mohammedan law of succession, the eldest brother or male relative of the reigning monarch is the heir-apparent to the throne, and almost all Moslem princes

have endeavoured to set aside the claims of their relatives in favour of their own children.

El Hadi was no exception to the rule, and conceived the idea of stripping his brother Haroun of his rights, and proclaiming his own son Jaafer as his successor. Yahya, the Barmecide, was then Haroun's secretary, and expected to exercise the important office of Vizier if ever his master should mount the throne. Hadi saw that his first step must be to conciliate Yahya ; he therefore took him apart, and having given him a present of 20,000 dinars, began to broach the subject nearest his heart. Yahya, however, brought a very strong argument to bear upon the point :—" If you do so, Prince of the Faithful," said he, " you will set your subjects an example of breaking an oath and disregarding a contract, and other people will be bold enough to do the same. But if you leave your brother Haroun in possession of his title of heir-apparent, and appoint your son Jaafer as next in succession to him, it will be much more likely to secure his ultimate accession to the throne." Hadi allowed the matter to rest for some time, but at length paternal affection got the better of him, and he again summoned Yahya into his presence and consulted him. Yahya urged that if the Caliph should die while Jaafer was yet a child, the chiefs of the imperial family would never recognise the validity of his succession. Hadi having acknow-

ledged the truth of this, Yahya continued, "Renounce then this project, in order the better to arrive at the consummation of your wishes. Even if your father, El Mehdi, had not appointed Haroun to succeed you, it would be policy on your part to do so, inasmuch as that is the only way to ensure the continuance of the Caliphate in the family of the Beni Hashem."

Hadi, finding that he could not alter Yahya's opinion, threw him into prison, and displayed so much animosity to his brother himself that the latter sought safety in flight.

Hadi's rage then turned against Haroun's mother, Kheizarán, whom he endeavoured to poison; but she, learning of his intention, bribed some of his own slave girls to smother him as he slept.

This took place on the 15th September, A.D. 786. The same night, one of Haroun's partisans, named Khuzeimat ibn Khazim, came to Jaafer (the young prince for whom El Hadi had wished to supplant Haroun) as he lay in bed, and threatened to cut off his head unless he renounced all rights to the Caliphate. The boy, taken by surprise, consented, and in the morning Khuzeimat took him out, and, presenting him before the people, compelled him to repeat publicly his abdication, and absolve the people from their oath of allegiance to him.

Yahya 'bn Khalid was still in prison when Hadi died; and, had not this event taken place,

would in all probability have been put to death himself.

The news having been brought to Haroun of his brother's death, and of his own accession to the throne, the new Caliph at once sent for Yahya, and invested him with the office of Grand Vizier. The form of words employed in the investment gave the new minister plenary power. "I invest you," said Haroun, "with the rule over my subjects. Rule them as you please; depose whom you will, and put whom you will into office;" and in ratification of his words he gave him his ring.

Some say that Haroun was asleep in bed, and that Yahya came to him and woke him up by saying, "Get up, oh Prince of the Faithful." "Why do you keep startling me by alluding to my accession to the Caliphate? What do you think Hadi will say if he hears of it?" Yahya then told him of Hadi's death, and gave him the deceased Caliph's ring. While he was yet speaking, another messenger came in, and told him of the birth of a son, to whom he gave then and there the name of Abdallah; this was the one that was afterwards called El Mamún. His second son, El Emín, was born in the month Shawwal of the same year by another mother.

His first act, after praying over the remains of El Hadi, was to put one Abu 'Isma to death. Abu 'Isma was walking out one day with Jaafer, Hadi's

son, and happening to meet Haroun in a narrow archway in the city of Isabad, exclaimed, "Make way for the heir-apparent." Haroun replied, with mock humility, "To hear is to obey, where the prince is concerned," and stood aside until Jaafer had passed by. This speech cost Abu 'Isma his life.

Haroun at once set out for Bagdad; and when he had entered the city, and reached the bridge called Jisr el Ghawwasin,[1] he said, "El Mehdi had given me this signet-ring, which he had bought for a hundred thousand dinars, and which was called El Jebel.[2] One day a messenger from Hadi came to me, and demanded it while I was standing on this very spot;" and as he spoke he threw it in the water. Some of the bystanders, however, dived in after it and fetched it up, to the Caliph's great delight.

Haroun's reign derives its lustre from the eminent men by whom he was surrounded, and the consummate ability with which, for the first seventeen years, the office of Vizier or Prime Minister was exercised by Yahya the Barmecide.

We must say a few words both on the nature of the office and the origin of Yahya's family.

We have seen how the Arabs, perforce, left the actual administration of the conquered countries in

[1] The Diver's Bridge.

[2] El Jebel means the mountain; so the name of the celebrated diamond, Koh-i-núr, means "Mountain of light."

the hands of native officials. The Abbasides owing their rise entirely to Persian influence, it was only natural that Persian counsels should prevail, and we accordingly find a minister of Persian extraction at the head of affairs, and the Caliphate carried on by almost precisely the same machinery as that by which the Empire of the Sassanians was governed.

Like the Sassanian emperors, the Caliph was not only the divinely appointed ruler, but the embodiment of the Government itself. His word was literally law, and his caprice might at any moment overturn the most careful calculations of the ministers, or deprive them of life, power, or liberty, during the performance of their most active duties, or at a most critical juncture. It was very seldom, however, that this awful personage condescended to trouble himself about the actual details of the executive Government. The Vizier,[1] as the word implies, was the one who bore the real burden of the State, and it was both his interest and that of the people at large to keep the Caliph himself as inactive as possible, and to reduce him, in fact, to the position of a mere puppet. The office of Caliphate was often filled by men who were mere puppets, the real power being vested in the Grand Vizier, who made and managed them.

[1] Vizier, in Arabic *Wazír*, means "One who bears a burden."

Thus, on the death of El Muktafí, in 908 A.D., his Vizier wished to set Abdallah ibn Mo'tazz on the throne; but some courtiers, more wise than the rest, warned him that the proposed prince was well versed in literature, and would be likely to know too much.

"What need is there for you," they said, "to set on the throne of the Caliphate one who knows its measure and its price, who understands affairs, and can distinguish good from bad, and knows your garden and your estate? You had better set a boy upon the throne, that he may have the *name* of Caliph and you the *meaning* thereof. You can educate him, and when he is grown up, he will owe all to you, and you can have your will during his ministry." So the Vizier substituted El Muktadir, who was then only thirteen years old.

Yahya's father, Khalid, the son of Barmek, belonged to the old Persian aristocracy, the Dehkans or landed proprietors, the ancient feudal lords of the country, whose ancestry dated back to the ancient and most brilliant period of the Persian Empire. Khalid's father was the *Barmek*, or guardian of the chief fire temple in Persia; and Khalid himself, who had ostensibly embraced Mohammedanism, but who was still devoted to the ancient faith and traditions of his country, attached himself to Abu Moslem, and became one of the foremost men in the movement

which overthrew the Ommiade throne. On the accession to power of the Abbaside dynasty, he quickly rose to the highest office in the State, and was Vizier to Es Saffáh, and after him to Mansúr, the second Caliph of the dynasty.

El Masudi, the historian, relates the following anecdote of his prudence and sagacity:—"Being sent by Abu Moslem to accompany the expedition against the governor of Irak, he and the general halted to take breakfast at a village on the way, when suddenly a herd of gazelles rushed from the desert, and ran into the camp amongst the soldiers. 'General!' exclaimed Khalid, 'order the men to mount at once.' Seeing no cause for alarm, the latter asked him what he meant. Khalid replied, 'The enemy are close upon us; nothing but the march of a large force would have driven these wild creatures from the desert into our camp.'" The troops were scarcely mounted, before an advancing hostile squadron was seen in the distance, and the truth of Khalid's deduction proved.

On his accession to the throne, Alraschid appointed Yahya 'bn Khalid ibn Barmek his lieutenant and Grand Vizier. Yahya, upon whom the whole responsibility of the Government really devolved, performed his duties with the most consummate ability and judgment. He fortified the frontiers and repaired all the deficiencies in the administration of the empire.

He filled the treasury, made the provinces flourishing and prosperous by encouraging trade and securing the public safety, and, in a word, brought the Caliphate up to the highest pitch of prosperity and glory. He personally superintended and organised the whole system of government. As a minister, he was eloquent, wise, accomplished, and prudent, and he was, moreover, an able administrator, ruling with a firm hand, and proving himself able to cope with any emergency that might arise.

With a most affable demeanour and great moderation, he combined an imposing dignity that commanded universal respect. His generosity was munificent in the extreme, and gained for him universal encomiums.

Yahya had two sons, El Fadhl and Jaafer: the former was associated with his father in his ministerial duties, and acquired the nickname of the "Little Vizier."

One day, Haroun asked Yahya how it was that people called El Fadhl by this name, and never gave it to Jaafer. "Because," said Yahya, "Fadhl acts as my deputy." "Well," replied the Caliph, "give Jaafer, too, some of the same offices as you entrust to his brother." "I cannot," answered the father; "his attention is too much occupied with your service and society." Yahya did, however, give Jaafer the post of secretary and controller of the Imperial

Household, and people henceforward called him by the same *sobriquet* as his brother.

On another occasion, Alraschid wished to take the office of Privy Seal from El Fadhl and to give it to Jaafer; but not liking to propose it himself, he requested their father to write and make known his wishes. Yahya, in consequence of this intimation, wrote to his eldest son as follows:—"The Prince of the Faithful—may God exalt his rule!—has ordered you to transfer the signet-ring from your right hand to your left." El Fadhl replied, "I have obeyed the Prince of the Faithful's orders concerning my brother. No prosperity that accrues to him is lost to me, and no rank that he attains is forfeited by me." Jaafer, when he saw this response, was delighted with his brother's affection, discernment, and wit.

Jaafer's position was a most responsible one, it being his duty to draw up and sign all the orders to the various officers throughout the whole empire, and to deliberate and decide upon all memorials and petitions presented to the Caliph, which often amounted to many hundreds daily.

El Fadhl was Haroun's foster brother, a tie that is considered in Moslem countries almost as near as blood relationship itself; he was, however, of an austere disposition.

Jaafer, the youngest of the two brothers, was, on the contrary, distinguished for his eloquence, his

high intellectual attainments, his generosity, and the gentleness of his disposition. Haroun Alraschid consequently preferred the company of Jaafer to that of his brother El Fadhl, and the two became the most intimate friends. He was the constant companion of the Caliph's hours of pleasure, and often the hour of early morning prayer came round and found Haroun and Jaafer with Abu Nawas, the jester poet, and Mesrúr, the black executioner, still over their cups.

The following anecdotes will illustrate the character of the father and his sons better than pages of description :—

After the fall of the Barmek family, Haroun forbade the poets to write elegies upon them, imposing severe penalties upon anyone who should act contrary to this regulation. It so happened that some of the night-watch were passing by one of the ruined palaces which had formerly belonged to the unfortunate family, when they came upon a man with a strip of paper in his hand containing an elegy upon the Barmeks, which he was reciting, weeping as he did so. The watch arrested him, and took him before Alraschid, to whom he at once acknowledged the fact. "Did you not know of my prohibition?" said the Caliph. "I'll make an example of you; I'll——" "If your Majesty will hear my story first," said the prisoner, "you may do what you please."

"Go on," said Haroun. "Formerly," commenced the poet, "I was one of the least of Yahya 'bn Khalid's clerks. One day the Vizier said to me, 'I wish you to entertain me at your house sometime or other.' I replied, 'Oh, my lord! I am not deserving of such an honour, and my house is quite unfit for you.' And as he would take no denial, I asked for a year's delay, that I might make fitting preparations; but he would not allow me more than a few months. So I set about my preparations, and as soon as they were completed to the best of my ability, I informed the minister that I was ready to receive him. The next day he came to me with his two sons, Jaafer and El Fadhl, and a few of his private suite. Then he stopped his horse at my door and alighted; 'Now then,' said he, 'I am hungry; make haste and get me something to eat.' And his son El Fadhl whispered, 'He likes roast fowl; bring whatever you have got as soon as possible.' So I went in and got the dinner ready. When the Vizier had finished eating, he got up and walked about the place, and then said suddenly, 'Now then, sir, show me all over your house.' I answered, 'This *is* my house, my lord; I have no other.' 'Oh yes, you have,' said he; 'you have another.' I assured him that it was the only one I possessed, whereupon he called for some masons, and when they appeared, he commanded them to break open a door in the wall. On this I

remonstrated, and said, 'Oh, my lord, how can I break into my neighbour's house, when God has commanded us to respect our neighbours' rights?' 'Never mind,' said he; and when the door was made, we all went through it, and came into a beautiful garden well planted with fruit and flowers, with fountains bubbling up, and summer-houses, and dwellings, and everything that could delight the eye. The house itself was beautifully furnished, and filled with servants and slave girls—everything on a most magnificent scale. 'This house,' said the Vizier, 'and all belonging to it, is yours.' Then I kissed his hands, and prayed for blessings on him, and he turned to his son Jaafer and said, 'How is he to keep up this establishment, my boy?' and Jaafer said, 'I will give him such and such an estate, and make out the conveyance of it to him immediately.' Then Yahya turned to El Fadhl and said, 'What is he to do, my boy, for ready money until he receives the revenues of his estate.' 'Oh,' said El Fadhl, 'I will give him ten thousand dinars, and bring them to him myself.' 'Well, make haste then,' said their father, 'both of you.' They were as good as their word, and I entered into possession of the house and the estate, and received the ready cash, and have made a large fortune with it over and above what they gave me, and I enjoy it now; and, God knows, oh, Prince of the Faithful, I have never lost an oppor-

tunity of showing my gratitude to them, although I never can repay the obligations I owe them; and if you like to kill me for that, you can; so do as you like!"

Alraschid was touched at the man's story, and had the common humanity to let him go; he also from that day removed his prohibition, and allowed the poets to write elegies on the beloved but unfortunate family.

Many profound maxims are attributed to Yahya; amongst others, he is reported to have said, "No one ever addressed me that I did not listen to with respect. When he had finished speaking, my respect for him had either increased or vanished altogether."

Another of his sayings was, "Promises are the nets of the generous with which they catch the praises of the good."

Whenever he rode abroad, he always took with him purses containing each a hundred dirhems, for distribution to those whom he might meet.

Jaafer and El Fadhl kept up the family tradition for liberality.

A coolness and estrangement had for a long time existed between Jaafer and the Viceroy of Egypt. It happened that a certain man forged a letter in Jaafer's name, containing strong recommendation of the bearer to the Viceroy. The latter, on receiving it, was delighted at what he thought an advance

towards reconciliation on Jaafer's part, and received and entertained the bearer of the letter with great cordiality and hospitality. But having some doubts as to the authenticity of the document, he sent it to his agent in Bagdad, with instructions to find out the truth. The agent consulted with Jaafer's agent, who showed it to his master. Jaafer took the letter in his hand, and at once recognising the imposture, threw it among his officers and attendants who were present, asking them if that was his writing. They all immediately declared it to be a forgery, and Jaafer asked what ought to be done in the case of a man who had thus taken liberties with his name. Some declared that he ought to be put to death as an example to deter others from such an act in future; others said he should have his right hand cut off; others, again, thought he should receive a good scourging, and be dismissed. The most merciful of them all suggested that he should be simply sent back, and that his having had all the long journey from Bagdad to Egypt for nothing would be sufficient punishment. Jaafer listened patiently to their opinions, and when they had finished, "What," said he, "is there not one man of good feeling amongst you? You all know the bad terms which I have been on with the Viceroy of Egypt, and that it is only pride which has prevented us from making advances towards reconciliation. Here is a man

whom God has raised up to open the door of reconciliation and correspondence, and to put an end to our enmity, and you advise me to reward him by doing him a mischief!" Then he took a pen and wrote on the back of the letter—"To the Viceroy of Egypt. Good God, how could you think that my letter was a forgery. It is my own handwriting, and the bearer is one of my most intimate friends. I hope you will treat him well, and send him back to me as soon as possible, for I am very anxious for his return."

When the Viceroy saw the Vizier's note on the back of the letter, he was very pleased, and heaped favours and presents on the man who had brought him the letter. The latter came back to Bagdad in most flourishing circumstances, and, presenting himself before Jaafer, fell down at his feet and wept, confessed the whole imposture, and begged for pardon. Jaafer asked him what the Viceroy of Egypt had given him, and hearing that he had received a hundred thousand dinars, he added a present of the same sum on his own account, and dismissed him.

They relate, too, that one day Jaafer had invited his intimate friends and boon companions, and determined to stay at home for a drinking bout. The apartment was profusely decorated, all the guests but one were assembled, dressed, as was their wont

on these occasions, in robes of divers brilliant colours; the wine was circulating freely, and the room rang with the notes of musical instruments and the voices of the singers. The guest who had not yet arrived was called Abd el Melik ibn Salih, and Jaafer had given strict orders not to admit anyone else on any pretext whatsoever. It so happened that one of the Caliph's near relations, one Abd el Melik ibn Salih ibn Ali 'bn 'Abdallah ibn Abbas, called to see Jaafer on some important business, and the porters, deceived by the similarity in names, at once admitted him. Now this other Abd el Melik ibn Salih was a person of most austere character and rigid morals, and although Jaafer had frequently tried to induce him to take part in one of his debauches, he had always persistently refused. On his admission into the room, both the visitor and his host perceived the situation at a glance; Jaafer was much embarrassed, but Abd el Melik was secretly pleased, and made up his mind to take advantage of the accident. In order to put Jaafer at his ease, he called for a parti-coloured robe, and joined with zest in the conversation, even drinking copious draughts of wine. Jaafer, delighted at having overcome the scruples of the great man, asked him what business it was that brought him there. "I came to beg your good offices with the Caliph," said Abd el Melik, "in three things. The first is, I owe a million dirhems which I wish

to pay; the second, that I want for my son the governorship of a province befitting his rank; thirdly, I wish to marry my son to the daughter of the Caliph, who is his cousin, and for whom he would be a suitable match." "God has granted you all three," said Jaafer. "As for the money, I will send it to your house this moment; as for the province, I will make your son Governor of Egypt; as for the marriage, I hereby betroth the lady so and so, daughter of the Prince of the Faithful, to him, with a dowry of such and such a sum. So now be off, and God bless you!"

When Abd el Melik reached his own home, he found the money there before him, and the next morning Jaafer sought the Caliph, and obtained the ratification of his appointment of Abd el Melik's son to the Governorship of Egypt, and induced the Caliph to consent to the youth's marriage with the princess.

Ishák ibn Ibrahim el Mosili relates—"I had brought up a damsel of great beauty, and educated her with such care that she had become unusually accomplished, then I made a present of her to El Fadhl, Yahya's son. El Fadhl, however, said to me, 'Oh, Ishak, the envoy of the Governor of Egypt has just been to ask me a particular favour. Keep this slave girl by you; I will tell him that I have taken a great fancy to her, and he, in

order to persuade me to accede to his request, will try and get her for me. But when he asks the price, be sure not to let her go for less than 50,000 dinars.' So I went home," continued Ishak, "and the envoy came to me, and asked me about the girl, and I brought her out, and he offered me 10,000 dinars. This sum I refused, and he went as high as 20,000, and then to 30,000. When he offered this price, I could not contain myself any longer, but cried 'Done,' handed him over the girl, and received the money. The next morning I went to El Fadhl, and told him just how it had happened. He only smiled and said, 'The ambassador from Room (the Byzantine Empire) has also asked a great favour of me. I will impose the same conditions on him; so take your slave girl home and wait for him, and be sure not to take less than 50,000 dinars.' Precisely the same thing happened with the envoy from Room; the very sound of the offer of 30,000 dinars was too much for me, and I sold him the girl. On the morrow, I went to El Fadhl, and he again gave me back the girl, telling me he would send me the ambassador from Khorassan the next morning. He was as good as his word, and this time I screwed up my courage sufficiently to demand 40,000 dinars. The next day I went to El Fadhl, and on his asking me what I had done, I said, 'I sold the damsel for 40,000 dinars, and, by Heaven, when I heard the

amount mentioned, I almost lost my senses. She has brought me—may I be your ransom!—a hundred thousand dinars, and I have nothing further to desire. God reward you.' Then he ordered the girl to be brought out and given to me, and told me to take her away. So I said, 'This girl is the greatest blessing in the world;' and I emancipated her, and married her, and she is the mother of my children."

His brother El Fadhl was no less generous. Mohammed ibn Ibrahim, surnamed the *Imám*, a grandson of Mohammed ibn Ali 'bn 'Abdallah ibn Abbas, came to El Fadhl one day, bringing a case filled with jewels. "My income," said he, "is not sufficient for my wants, and I already owe more than a million dirhems. I am ashamed to let anybody know my circumstances, and I do not like to apply to any merchant, although I have here a sufficient security. You have merchants who deal with you; may I beg of you to borrow the sum in question for me on these jewels?" "With pleasure," said El Fadhl; "but on condition that you stay with me all day." Mohammed consented, and El Fadhl took the case just as it was sealed up with its owner's seal, and sent it, together with a million dirhems, to Mohammed's, telling the messenger to bring back a receipt for it. Mohammed stayed with El Fadhl till the evening, and, on returning home, was both

surprised and delighted at finding his jewel-case and the money. Early the next morning, he set off to El Fadhl's house to thank him, but he found that he had already started to make a call upon the Caliph. Mohammed followed him to the palace; but as soon as El Fadhl heard of his arrival there, he went out by another door to avoid him, and made for his father's house. When Mohammed learnt where he had gone, he followed him, but El Fadhl had left before he reached the door, and had gone home, where at length the two met. Mohammed began to express his gratitude, and told him how he had started out early in order to thank him for his generosity, when El Fadhl replied, "I thought over your business, and I saw that the million I had sent you would only just pay your debts, and that you would be as badly in want of money as ever, and be obliged to run in debt again. So I went off early to see the Commander of the Faithful, and I explained your circumstances to him, and obtained another million for you. The reason I went out of another door to avoid you was that I did not wish to meet you until I had sent the money to your house; but it has gone now." "How shall I ever repay you?" said Mohammed. "The only way I can show my gratitude is to engage myself by the most sacred oath never to pay court to anyone but you, and never to ask a favour of anyone else." This oath he

actually took, reduced it to writing, and caused it to be properly witnessed.

When, sometime afterwards, the Barmek family were ruined and disgraced, and El Fadhl ibn er Rabí held the office of Vizier, Mohammed again got into difficulties, and was recommended to apply to the new minister. Mindful, however, of his oath, he refused to ask or accept a favour at anyone's hand until his death.

Haroun's own unbounded liberality, especially to poets, lawyers, and divines, naturally earned for him the gratitude of these classes, and contributed no little to the reputation for justice and clemency which he enjoyed, but which his history shows him to have so little deserved.

No Caliph ever gathered round him so great a number of learned men, poets, jurists, grammarians, cadis, and scribes, to say nothing of the wits and musicians who enjoyed his patronage. Personally, too, he had every quality that could recommend him to the literary men of his time. Haroun himself was an accomplished scholar and an excellent poet: he was well versed in history, tradition, and poetry, which he could always quote on appropriate occasions. He possessed exquisite taste and unerring discernment, and his dignified demeanour made him an object of profound respect to high and low.

It is no wonder then that all contemporary writers

are extravagant in his praises, and endeavour to conceal the darker side of his character.

Later authors we might expect to be less favourable in their criticisms; but it must be remembered that the reign of Alraschid was one of the most brilliant in the annals of the Caliphate, and the limits of the empire were then more widely extended than at any other period; that the greater part of the Eastern world and a large portion of Western Africa submitted to his laws, and paid tribute into his treasury; and that the city of Bagdad was then at the height of its splendour and magnificence; whereas, immediately after his death, the city began to lose its importance, the provinces fell away from the empire one by one, and the power of the Caliphs themselves rapidly declined. This was an additional reason for Moslem writers to look back with admiration and regret upon the period of greatness and prosperity, and to keep up the tradition of the magnificence of his reign.

Of his real character the events described in the following chapters will enable us to judge.

CHAPTER II.

"THE GOLDEN PRIME."

THE city of Damascus, full as it was of memorials of the pride and greatness of the Ommiade dynasty, was naturally distasteful to the Abbasides. The Caliph Mansúr had commenced the building of a new capital in the neighbourhood of Kufa, to be called after the founder of his family, Hashimîyeh. The Kufans, however, were devoted partisans of the descendants of Ali, and although there had as yet been no actual breach between them and the Abbasides, neither party could forget that it was by a trick that the Alides had been deprived of the advantages of the insurrection which had been excited in their name, and that it was on the strength of the Alide claims that the Abbasides had mounted to power. The growing jealousy and distrust between the two houses made it inadvisable for the Beni Abbas to plant the seat of their empire in immediate propinquity to the head-quarters of the Ali faction, and Mansúr therefore selected another site. This was Bagdad, on

the western bank of the Tigris. It was well suited by nature for a great capital. The Tigris brought commerce from Diyar Bekr on the north, and through the Persian Gulf from India and China on the east; while the Euphrates, which here approaches the Tigris at the nearest point, and is reached by a good road, communicated directly with Syria and the west. The name Bagdad is a very ancient one, signifying "given or founded by the deity," and testifies to the importance of the site. The new city rapidly increased in extent and magnificence, the founder and his next two successors expending fabulous sums upon its embellishment, and the ancient palaces of the Sassasian kings, as well as the other principal cities of Asia, were robbed of their works of art for its adornment.

Here, in the midst of the most amazing pomp and luxury, with an empire which extended from the confines of India and Tartary to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, with illimitable resources at his command, with absolutely despotic power, and surrounded by all the brightest wit and learning that the age could afford, lived the Caliph Haroun Alraschid.

But the very extent of the empire, and the impossibility of centralising the authority, so as not to afford opportunity to ambitious or unscrupulous governors either to assert their own independence or to oppress the people for their private aggrandisement, made

the reign of Haroun Alraschid a very stirring one, in a military sense.

Scarcely a year passed without a revolution in one or other of the provinces. The various opposing parties were all as actively hostile as ever: in Syria and Mesopotamia, the sympathy with the Ommiades, in Khorassan, the undying hostility to Arab rule and Arab faith, and everywhere dissatisfaction at the extortions and oppression of the provincial governors, were active sources of trouble to the government of the Caliph.

In order to show what the state of the empire was, and the relation of the various provinces to the central government, it will be necessary to enumerate a few of the principal of these insurrectionary movements.

The fifth year of Alraschid's reign, A.D. 791, was disturbed by the revolt of Yahya 'bn Abdallah, a lineal descendent of Ali ibn Abi Talib, cousin, son-in-law, and successor of Mohammed. The fate of his brothers, En Nafs ez Zakíyeh and Ibrahím, during a former reign, had naturally inspired Yahya 'bn Abdallah with considerable fears for his own safety, and he therefore took refuge in Deilem, A.H. 175. There his claims to the Imámate—that is, to the exercise by divine right of the highest authority in Islam—were speedily recognised by the populace, who proclaimed him the legitimate Caliph. A large

number of people soon began to flock to his standard from all quarters, and the movement presently assumed such threatening proportions, that Haroun Alraschid was obliged to resort to active measures of repression. He accordingly despatched El Fadhl, son of Yahya his Prime Minister, with an army of fifty thousand men against the insurgents, and appointed him Governor of Jorjan, Taberistan, and Rye. Yahya marched with his army to within a short distance of the head-quarters of Yahya 'bn Abdallah, and probably fearing the effect of the religious enthusiasm of the enemy's troops—since the rebel chief was a lineal descendant of Ali, and therefore legitimate head of the Shiah sect, to which almost all Persians belonged—he abstained from giving him battle, and entered into negotiations for a peaceful settlement. Yahya 'bn Abdallah at length yielded to the specious promises of the envoy of the Abbaside Caliph, and agreed to capitulate, on condition that Alraschid would give him an autograph letter of amnesty, signed by the Cadis or magistrates, and the Fakihs or legal officers of the Empire, as witnesses. To this the Caliph, who was much annoyed at the pretensions of his rival, and at the success which had hitherto attended him, consented, and an amnesty, couched in the most unreserved terms, was forwarded to him, signed not only by the officers just mentioned, but by the elders of the Royal House

of the Beni Hashem, to which Alraschid belonged. This letter, accompanied by rich presents, induced the Pretender to go with El Fadhl to Bagdad, and on his arrival he was received by the Caliph with the greatest cordiality. He had not been at the capital, however, for many days, before Alraschid had him thrown into prison, and summoned a council of the legal officers of the State to deliberate upon the validity of the amnesty. Some of them, to their honour be it said, maintained that a document so solemnly ratified must remain in force; but others, to curry the Imperial favour, declared that it was null and void, and their opinion was of course eagerly adopted.

When a sovereign requires an excuse for punishing a subject, there is always some wretch willing to perjure himself in order to get himself into favour by bringing a false accusation against the obnoxious individual, and so it was in the case of Yahya 'bn Abdallah.

A certain man of the family of Zobeir ibn Awwam traduced Yahya to Alraschid, and declared that, since he had received the letter of amnesty, he had been conspiring and endeavouring to collect another army, with the intention of again unfurling the standard of revolt at the first opportunity.

The Caliph at once sent for the prisoner, confronted him with the Zobeiri, and demanded of him

if there was any truth in the charges which the latter had made against him. Yahya indignantly denied them, and dared his accuser to repeat the calumnies on his oath. The Zobeiri, however, professed his readiness to do so, and commenced to say, " By God, who seeketh out and punisheth the guilty——;" but before he could finish the oath, Yahya interrupted him. " Stop!" said he; "let that oath alone; for God never hastens to punish man when he glorifies Him. Swear it rather by the oath of clearance, the greatest oath there is, where one declares oneself clear of the 'strength and power of God,' and relies ever after upon his own strength and power if such and such is the case."

The accuser trembled on hearing this formula. "What an outrageous oath!" said he; "I will not swear it." "What is the meaning of this refusal?" asked the Caliph. "If you are telling the truth, what have you to fear from the oath?" The wretched man, knowing what he had to expect if he confessed to having told a lie, thus both baulking the Caliph of his revenge, and conveying the impression that the monarch had himself suborned him, or at least connived at his false testimony, determined to take the oath required of him, and thus sealed the death-warrant of Yahya.

Here the historians relate a signal instance of divine retribution. Scarcely had the Zobeiri left the

assembly, when he stumbled against something in the way, and so injured himself in falling, that he died before the day was out. When they came to bury him, the earth with which they attempted to fill up the tomb mysteriously sank away as fast as they threw it in, and they could not succeed in filling up the grave. Recognising this as a sign of the wrath of Heaven for the blasphemous perjury that had been committed, they gave up the attempt, and covered over the tomb with a sort of roof and left it.

But Alraschid, with all his piety, did not care for a miracle when it was in opposition to his own passions, and in spite of the amnesty, and the divine testimony to Yahya's innocence, the latter was put to a cruel death in prison.

In the same year, threatening symptoms of a revolution appeared in Egypt, and Haroun recalled the governor, Musa 'bn Isa, a cousin of the Caliph's father, whom he had been led to suspect was harbouring sinister designs against him, and had instigated the movement.

When Haroun heard this, he declared that he would depose him, and replace him by the meanest of those about his door. He accordingly ordered Jaafer to bring one Omar ibn Mehran, who was surnamed Abu Hafs, to him, a man of extremely ugly countenance, with a cast in his eye, who used to dress in a very mean fashion, and to ride

about with his servant on the same horse behind him. When the Caliph asked this forbidding-looking personage if he was ready to go to Egypt as governor, he replied churlishly, "I am ready to govern the place, on condition that as soon as I have set the country in order I shall come back whenever I please." Haroun consented to this arrangement, and Omar set out. Arrived at Cairo, he made straight for Musa's house, and sat down in the last row of those who were attending the *levée*. When all the rest had departed, Musa noticed him, and asked him what he wanted. Omar handed him the Caliph's letter, and the governor, on reading it, said, "And has Abu Hafs arrived, God bless him?" "I am Abu Hafs," replied the bearer of the note. Musa said, "May God curse Pharoah for saying, 'Is not the Kingdom of Egypt mine?'" (*Koran*, c. v.)

However, he resigned the governorship to the new-comer without any further hesitation, and Omar entered then and there upon his duties. His first instructions to his secretary were not to accept any presents on his behalf, except what could be put into his purse; so when the grandees and officials brought the customary presents, he refused all such gifts as horses, slave girls, and the like, and only accepted ready money and valuable clothes. These he carefully put by, labelling each with the name of the giver.

Hitherto the people of Egypt had always been backward with their taxes, and this Omar determined to put a stop to. So he began by making an example of a certain man, and sued him for his taxes; the debtor tried to put him off, and declared that he would only pay it at Bagdad itself. Omar took him at his word, and, although he remonstrated and offered to find the money, sent him to the capital. After that, no one tried to put him off; and the first and second instalments were regularly paid. When, however, it came to the third instalment, the people were unable to pay, and were obliged to ask for a delay, complaining that they found themselves short of money. Thereupon, Omar produced the presents which had been made him, paid them into the treasury, credited the givers with the amounts, and then sued them for the balance. They saw that so unusually honest a governor was not to be trifled with, and contrived to find the money; so that, for the first time within the memory of man, the Egyptian revenue was punctually paid. Having accomplished this, Omar resigned his post, and went back to Bagdad.

In the year 176 A.H. the old quarrel broke out in Damascus between the Modhari and Yemeni clans. Amir ibn Amarah, surnamed Abu Heidham, a celebrated Arab knight, was at the head of the Modharis, and the beginning of the quarrel was that

one of Alraschid's officers in Sejistan had killed one of Abu Heidham's brothers. Abu Heidham, hearing the news, gathered a number of people to his standard, and revolted.

Like most distinguished Arabs, he was a poet, and some verses which he composed as an elegy on his brother, and which he used to recite in public, served to inflame the minds of the populace.

Alraschid having induced another brother of Abu Heidham to betray him, seized the rebel chief and took him prisoner. As his insurrection, however, was not an important one, and arose from no antagonism to the Caliph's authority itself, he set him free.

About the same time (177 A.H.), El Attaf ibn Sufeyan el Azadí, one of the most powerful chiefs of Mosul, also revolted against Alraschid's lieutenant there, Mohammed ibn Abbas El Hashimi, and, placing himself at the head of 4000 men, collected the taxes, and held possession of the city for two years, when Alraschid himself attacked it, and destroyed the walls.

Attaf escaped to Armenia. With a view to quieting the disaffected provinces, El Fadhl ibn Yahya el Barmeki was appointed by the Caliph governor of Khorassan in this year, in addition to the provinces of Rai and Seistan, which he already held.

In the year 794, the Haufiyeh in Egypt revolted against their governor, Ishak ibn Suleiman; but

Alraschid sent Herthemat ibn Ayan, who was then Viceroy of Palestine, against them, who reduced them to submission.

The Haufiyeh were connected with the Cais and Cudha'ah tribes, who had taken a conspicuous part in the disturbances at Damascus.

A more important revolt was that of El Walid ibn Taríf es Sheibani in Mesopotamia. Having beaten two detachments of the Caliph's forces, Alraschid despatched Yezid ibn Mazyed, also a member of the Sheibani clan, to reduce him to submission; but Yezid, probably disliking to attack his clansman, continued to shilly-shally and temporise with him.

The Barmek family were on bad terms with Yezid, and told Alraschid that he was only trifling with El Walid through friendly feeling, because they both belonged to the same stock.

The Caliph, influenced by their insinuations, wrote to Yezid an angry letter, in which he said, "If I had sent one of the common servants, he would have accomplished more than you have done; but it is evident that you are not to be depended on, and have a bigoted attachment to your own tribe, and I swear by God that if you do not make haste to punish him, I will send some one to bring me back your head."

Yezid, on this, thought it necessary to make a decisive move, and at length encountered El Walid.

He arrived at the place of conflict in bad condition, being so thirsty after his march that he was obliged to put his ring into his mouth and suck it. Addressing his troops, he said, "May my mother and father be a ransom for you. These are only undisciplined rebels who are going to attack you; but do you stand firm, and when their attack is over, charge them, for if once they are routed they will never rally." The event turned out as he had predicted. Yezid and his troops withstood the charge of the enemy, then rushed upon them and broke their ranks.

Yezid's son, Asad, was present in the engagement with his father. There is said to have been such a striking likeness between father and son, that the only thing by which they could be distinguished one from the other was that Yezid had a scar on his face from a sword-cut right across his forehead. Asad wished to get a similar scar, and when, during the fight, he saw a blow about to descend, he put his head above his buckler, and received the blow in the same place as his father had been wounded.

Yezid pursued El Walid, captured him, and beheaded him.

When El Walid was slain, his sister Laila herself joined the troops, clad in armour, and led them on to the charge. Yezid, however, recognised her, and, riding up to her, made a thrust at the crupper of her horse with his lance, and cried, "Get thee home;

thou 'rt disgracing the clan!" whereupon she became ashamed of her effrontery, and retired. She was a poetess of no mean capacity, and wrote an elegy on her brother, El Walid, which is still preserved.

Africa had belonged to the Caliphate in little more than name, but, under the energetic governorship of Yezid ibn Hatim el Muhallebi, had enjoyed a certain amount of quiet, and acknowledged the authority of Haroun Alraschid.

In 786 Hatim died, leaving his son Dáúd provisionally governor in his stead. An insurrection of the Ibádhíyeh, a sect of the Kharegites, broke out about this time, and Dáúd despatched a body of troops against them; but the insurgents were victorious, and routed the army. Dáúd, however, sent some reinforcements, and the Ibádhíyeh were dispersed with much slaughter.

Dáúd remained in office for nine months, when Alraschid appointed his uncle, Rauh ibn Hatim, governor instead.

The province continued quiet under his administration, chiefly for the reason, as the historian naïvely remarks, that his brother Yezid had killed so many of the rebels. He, too, died at Cairowan, and was buried by the side of his brother in the month of Ramazan.

Alraschid now appointed El Fadhl, son of the last-mentioned viceroy, ruler over the African provinces

in place of Habib ibn Nasr el Mohallebi, whom he had sent there, and now recalled.

El Fadhl designated his nephew, El Mogheirah, his lieutenant in Tunis; but this officer rendered himself very unpopular with the army as well as with the Tunisian chiefs, who demanded his removal. To this his cousin, the Governor-General, refused to listen, whereupon the Caïds (or chieftains) assembled together, appointed one Ibn el Jarúd their leader, and expelled El Mogheirah. At the same time they wrote to El Fadhl, declaring that they did not wish to throw off their allegiance to the Government, but had only expelled the lieutenant-governor because of his oppression and bad behaviour, and demanded that El Fadhl should send some one else to assume the office.

El Fadhl accordingly sent his cousin Abdallah, a son of Yezid ibn Hatim, and when he was about a day's journey from Tunis, Ibn el Jarúd despatched some troops to find out whom he had with him, but strictly enjoined them to do nothing without his orders.

The leaders of the expedition, however, imagining that El Fadhl had sinister intentions in sending his cousin, and that he would revenge himself on them for expelling his nephew, set upon the party, killed the newly-appointed lieutenant-governor, and brought back his generals prisoners.

Ibn el Jarúd and his party were now fairly committed to the revolt, and obliged to use all their efforts to procure the removal of El Fadhl.

Ibn el Farsí, who had been original instigator of the movement, assumed the command, and adopted a most ingenious though treacherous plan for assuring the co-operation of his fellow-chiefs. He wrote a separate letter to each of the Cáïds and Prefects of cities in Africa, saying, "The misconduct of El Fadhl in the dominions of the Prince of the Faithful is such that we are compelled to revolt from his authority. And since we know of no one more fitted to act as Vicegerent of the Prince of the Faithful than yourself, and no one of more influence over the army, we have resolved, if victorious, to make you our leader, and we have written to the Prince of the Faithful to appoint you governor of the province. Should we, however, prove unsuccessful, no one need know that we ever wished to place you in such a position. Adieu."

This turned all the officers against El Fadhl, and brought large numbers to the insurgents' standard, including many of the soldiery. On the very first engagement El Fadhl was defeated, and withdrew to Cairowan, where he made a stand for a day; but in the next Ibn el Jarúd succeeded in forcing the gates, drove them out, and pursued them to Cabus, where El Fadhl was killed.

The death of their leader so exasperated the army

that they rallied, and, making El Ala ibn Saíd, governor of the city of Záb, their general, repelled two severe attacks of Ibn el Jarúd, but were unable to hold Cairowan against him.

Haroun Alraschid, hearing of Ibn el Jarúd's revolt, ordered Herthemat ibn Ayan to proceed to the country and repress the movement; but he sent on Yahya 'bn Musa beforehand to try and induce the rebel chief to come to terms. Yahya arrived just as Ibn el Jarúd had fortified himself in Cairowan, and entered into negotiations with him, showing him the Caliph's letter. Ibn el Jarúd endeavoured to temporise and to deceive the envoy, saying that if he surrendered Cairowan, the native Africans who were with El Ala would seize the place, and it would be lost to the Imperial Government. But he promised that, if he conquered El Ala in the sortie which he intended to make, he would wait for the arrival of Herthemah; while, if he were conquered himself, Yahya could do as he pleased. Yahya saw plainly what his intentions were, and that if he did conquer El Ala, he could defy Herthemah. So he took Ibn el Farsí aside, reproached him with his breach of allegiance, and induced him, by the hope of his own complicity being overlooked, to aid in reducing Ibn el Jarúd. Ibn el Farsí thereupon again brought his perfidious policy into play, and, by calumniating Ibn el Jarúd, gained over a large number of the soldiery, and gave

him battle. Ibn el Jarúd determined on revenging himself, and arranged with one of his friends, named Talib, that he would distract Ibn el Farsí's attention by reproaching him with his treachery, and that Talib should then seize the opportunity and kill him. This plan was carried out, the traitor was killed, and his army routed. Yahya then went off to join Herthemah at Tripoli, and as soon as it became known that the Imperial Commissioner was so near, people flocked in from all sides to the standard of El Ala. Ibn el Jarúd, seeing his disadvantage, wrote to Yahya, offering to surrender Cairowan to him, and Yahya accordingly set off for that place, which Ibn Jarud vacated. El Ala and Yahya hurried on to the town, each hoping to reach it before the other, and get all the glory for himself. El Ala was the first to arrive, and having taken possession of the place, set off and joined Herthemah. But Ibn el Jarúd had already surrendered himself to the last-named general, who sent him to Bagdad with a letter to the Caliph, informing him that El Ala had been the cause of his revolt. Alraschid wrote and ordered El Ala to be sent to him, and when he arrived, he gave him presents and *khilas* or dresses of honour, equivalent to modern "decorations." Ibn el Jarúd was kept a prisoner at Bagdad. Herthemah took possession of Cairowan in the month of Rabi' I, and the province was once again quieted for a time.

Herthemah, however, found the people of Africa so turbulent, and insurrections so frequent, that he ultimately resigned the governorship of the province in Ramadhan, 181 A.H.

Mohammed ibn Mukatil, a foster-brother of the Caliph, was now made Viceroy of Africa in place of Herthemat ibn Ayan. He rendered himself obnoxious to the soldiery, who joined with the natives and revolted against his authority, making Makhled ibn Murreh their leader. The latter was unsuccessful, and was forced to take refuge in a mosque, where he was taken and slain.

The Tunisians also rebelled against the Viceroy, and attacked Cairowan in 799 A.D., under the leadership of Temmam ibn Temím. Having conquered the town, he allowed Mohammed to depart unhurt, on condition that he left Africa for good.

Ibrahim ibn el Aghlab, Prefect of the province of Záb, however, drove out Temmam and recalled Mohammed. But the reinstatement of the latter was only a trick of Ibrahim ibn el Aghlab, who, by representing to the Caliph the extreme unpopularity of the governor, and offering to pay into the imperial treasury an annual sum of 40,000 dinars, instead of drawing out of it 100,000 yearly as the other governors had done, induced Haroun to appoint him to the office instead. The Caliph, who saw that he could not retain Africa without immense

sacrifices if Ibrahim went over to his enemies, not only accepted this proposal, but allowed the office to become hereditary in the Aghlabite family.

Such Mohammedanism as the Berber inhabitants of West Africa had was of a very heterodox character; they still clung to their ancient forms of belief, and, like the Persians, welcomed any form of Islam which enabled them to escape from the rigid bonds of Semitic orthodoxy. For the same reason as the Persians, therefore, they opened their arms to the descendants of Ali, who represented the more romantic and liberal side of their religion.

Already, in the year 786, under the Caliph El Hadi, Edris, a lineal descendant of Hasan, the son of Ali, having taken part in an unsuccessful insurrection at Mecca, fled to Africa, where, two years after, he proclaimed himself Imám, and was recognised as sovereign by a large number of the Berber tribes. In a short space of time he had gained possession of the whole of the further Maghreb, and fixed upon Telemsan as his capital city. Haroun Alraschid, hearing of this, consulted Yahya the Barmecide, who despatched an Arab named Suleiman to assassinate the young prince. Suleiman, by professing great devotion to the Alide cause, gained Edris' confidence, and took the opportunity of presenting him with a phial of volatile poison, which caused his death, A.D. 791–792. The murderer escaped, but not without some severe

wounds on the head and the loss of one hand, inflicted by Raschid, the friend and guardian of Edris. The crime was, however, useless, as one of Edris' wives brought forth a son shortly after, who was recognised as his father's successor. The town of Fez, which was founded by one of the dynasty in 807, became their capital.

Ibrahim ibn el Aghlab at first conceived the idea of absorbing this kingdom into his own, the young Edris II. being then in his minority; but abstained from hostilities, probably because he thought the presence of an Alide monarchy in such close neighbourhood to the Ommiade dynasty, which had already established itself in Spain, would prove useful to him in case of a rupture with the Caliph of Bagdad.

But in addition to troubles in the provinces of his own empire, and wars with Moslem foes, the Caliph had the standing feud to carry on with the Byzantine empire, and also a perpetual conflict to wage with the Turkoman barbarians of Khozar.

Against neither the one nor the other of these was he able to hurl the whole irresistible force of the Mussulman army, the services of large bodies of his troops being always required in some part of his dominion to suppress an insurrection. He made, however, yearly raids into the Greek territory, either in person or by his lieutenants, gaining each time a

large booty in property and slaves. In the year 791 A.D., during a very hard winter, they appear to have suffered a severe reverse; but in some sea-fights at Crete, according to the Arab authorities, and at Cyprus, according to the Byzantine writers, the Moslems were the victors. The Admiral Theophilus was taken prisoner and brought before Haroun Alraschid, who offered him the usual choice between embracing Mohammedanism or death. On his refusal, he was hewn in pieces.

In the year 797–798, Haroun marched on and seized the town of Safsaf, whilst Abd el Melik ibn Salih pressed on to Ancyra. The events which followed the blinding of Constantine by his unnatural mother paralysed the Greeks, and after an interchange of captives, the first that had taken place under the Abbasides, the Arabs returned home, and a four years' truce was concluded, the Empress Irene having agreed to the payment of a heavy tribute.

Haroun himself was so much occupied by the massacres of his co-religionists in Armenia by the Khozars, that he was unable to take advantage of the defenceless position of the Byzantines.

In 802, on Nicephorus obtaining possession of the throne, the war broke out anew. The new emperor wrote a letter to Haroun, couched in the following terms:—

"From Nicephorus, King of the Greeks, to Haroun, King of the Arabs.

"The empress who preceded me considered you as a Rook and herself as a Pawn. She paid you tribute when you ought to have paid her double the amount. This was out of a woman's weakness and stupidity. So when you have read this letter of mine, send back the tribute you have received of her, and ransom yourself with whatever you may be called upon to pay, otherwise the sword is between you and me."

When Haroun read this, he was in such a fearful rage that no one dared look at him, much less to speak to him, and all the courtiers retired from his presence. Then he called for a pen and ink, and wrote on the back of Nicephorus' letter—"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From Haroun, Commander of the Faithful, to Nicephorus, the dog of the Greeks. I have read your letter, you son of a she-infidel, and you shall see the answer before you hear it."

"He set forth that very day, camped at Heraclea, and conquered, plundered, burnt, and ruined," to quote an old Arab historian, until Nicephorus, who was occupied with the rebel, Bardanes, was compelled to sue for peace. This the Caliph consented to grant at last, on condition that Nicephorus paid him a tribute every half-year.

But when Haroun had returned and settled at

Rakkeh, Nicephorus, having conquered Bardanes, and thinking that as the cold was then very severe the Caliph could not return to invade his territory, broke the treaty.

When this news reached Rakkeh, no one dared to tell it to Haroun, fearing lest they might be despatched on active service in the inclement weather.

At length a certain poet contrived to hint to the Caliph how matters stood:

"Nicephorus has broken the terms which thou didst give him,
But the wheel of destruction will revolve upon him;
Give glad tidings to the Prince of Believers, for, verily, it is a great victory that God will give thee,
A victory surpassing all the victories of this our day,
In the triumph thy triumphant banners will gain."

When Alraschid heard this, he cried out, "Ah! and has Nicephorus done this?" and was much incensed to find that his ministers had deceived him. He at once set out for the Grecian frontier, and although the weather was most inclement, and the hardships undergone by the Moslems were terrible, Nicephorus was defeated, with a loss of 40,000 men. A fresh exchange of captives and a truce followed; but the Greeks, taking advantage of the insurrection of Ali ibn Isa in Khorassan, of which we shall speak later, again commenced hostilities.

Haroun at once conducted a host of 135,000 men,

and took Heraclea, while his generals conquered and dismantled other fortresses, and his fleet captured 17,000 prisoners at Cyprus, and sent them on to Syria.

Nicephorus, now quite disheartened, was obliged to make peace on most humiliating terms, paying a poll-tax for himself and family, and promising never to rebuild Heraclea. Of course, as soon as Haroun returned home, all these promises were forgotten, and in 807 the Greeks defeated Yezid ibn Makhled, who had been sent against them with 10,000 men, in the neighbourhood of Tarsus. Herthemat ibn Ayan, who with 30,000 men had been posted to guard the frontier and watch the building of the fortifications at Tarsus, was equally unfortunate, and, as he was shortly after obliged to leave for Khorassan to quell the disturbances there, the Byzantines were able for a while to defy the Moslem power.

Haroun vented his spleen on the Christians in his dominions, by again bringing into force the obselete regulations and disabilities imposed upon them by the Caliph Omar at the taking of Jerusalem by the Moslems. These were as follows :—

"The Christians shall enjoy security both of person and property; the safety of their churches shall be, moreover, guaranteed, and no interference is to be permitted, on the part of the Mohammedans, with any of their religious exercises, houses, or institutions; provided only that such

churches, or religious institutions, shall be open night and day to the inspection of the Moslem authorities. All strangers and others are to be permitted to leave the town if they think fit; but anyone electing to remain shall be subject to the herein-mentioned stipulations. No payment shall be exacted from anyone until after the gathering in of his harvest. Mohammedans are to be treated everywhere with the greatest respect; the Christians must extend to them the rights of hospitality, rise to receive them, and accord them the first place of honour in their assemblies. The Christians are to build no new churches, convents, or other religious edifices, either within or without the city, or in any other part of the Moslem territory; they shall not teach their children the Koran; but, on the other hand, no one shall be prevented from embracing the Mohammedan religion. No public exhibition of any kind of the Christian religion is to be permitted. They shall not in any way imitate the Moslems, either in dress or behaviour, nor make use of their language in writing or engraving, nor adopt Moslem names or appellations. They shall not carry arms, nor ride astride their animals, nor wear or publicly exhibit the sign of the cross. They shall not make use of bells, nor strike the *nákús* (wooden gongs), except with a suppressed sound; nor shall they place their lamps in public places, nor raise their voices in lamentation for the dead. They shall shave the front part of the head and gird up their dress; and, lastly, they shall never intrude into any Moslem's house on any pretext whatever. To these conditions Omar added the following clause, to be accepted by the Christians:—That no Christian should strike a Moslem, and that, if they failed to comply with any single one of the previous stipulations, they should confess that their lives

were justly forfeit, and that they were deserving of the punishment inflicted upon rebellious subjects."

We have hitherto spoken only of the imperial events of Haroun's reign, and the figure of the Caliph appears throughout the history as a central one, no doubt, but still a very impalpable one. The course of events was not, however, directed by Haroun himself, but by the Vizier, Yahya ibn Barmek, and his sons; and the personal history of the Caliph is so intimately connected with this family, that it is impossible to judge of him as an individual apart from his relations with them.

Readers of the "Arabian Nights" are familiar with the name of Jaafer the Barmecide, the constant companion of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid in his nightly *incognito* walks through the city of Bagdad; and the expression, "a Barmecide feast," from a comic story in the same collection of tales, has passed into a proverb in our language. The story of the Barmecides, and especially of the fate of Jaafer, is perhaps one of the most pathetic in the annals of Oriental history, and that story we must now proceed to tell.

CHAPTER III.

THE FALL OF THE BARMECIDES.

HAROUN'S treatment of the family of Yahya, his old protector and guardian, and particularly the murder of his friend and companion, Jaafer, is a dark spot in his career.

Various causes are assigned for the Caliph's sudden change of disposition towards the Barmecides, and various influences were certainly at work against them. In the first place, the fact that a family of purely Persian origin monopolised the important offices of the State, and virtually held the reins of government in their own hands, was intolerable to the Arab party. These, headed by El Fadhl ibn Rabia, whose father had been Vizier to El Hadi, but had been removed by Haroun to make way for Yahya, lost no opportunity of plotting and of poisoning the Caliph's mind against them. On one occasion a copy of anonymous verses was presented to Alraschid, in which the writer said—

"Say to God's trusty servant on earth, to him who

has the power to loose and bind, Lo! the sons of Yahya are kings like thee; there is no longer any difference between you; thy behests are altered by them, but theirs are implicitly fulfilled. Jaafer has built a palace, in the like of which no Persian or Indian ever dwelt. The floor thereof is set with pearls and rubies, and the ceiling thereof is of amber and aloes wood; we even fear lest he may inherit thy kingdom when thou art hidden in the grave. None but an arrogant slave dare so vie with his lord."

The laxity of the Barmecides in religious observances, their obvious leanings towards the Shiah heresies, and the free-thinking opinions openly expressed at the discussions which took place at their palaces, were also eagerly seized upon by their enemies, and used for the purpose of calumniating them with the orthodox Haroun. Presently a numerously-signed petition was presented to him by a certain divine, couched in the following terms:—

"Prince of Believers! what answer wilt thou give on the Resurrection Day, and how wilt thou justify thyself before Almighty God, for having given to Yahya ibn Khalid, his sons and relations, such unlimited control over the Mussulmans, and entrusted to them the government of the State—these godless infidels who secretly hold the doctrines of the Atheists?"

Haroun showed the petition (perhaps as a caution)

to Yahya, and Mohammed, the writer, was thrown into prison; but the words undoubtedly made an impression on the Caliph's mind.

Still, there is every reason to believe that the charge of infidelity, as well as that of disloyalty and boundless ambition, would have been disregarded, had it not been for a private scandal, which Haroun thought to hush up by dealing summarily with all the actors in it. The knowledge of it might have been confined at least to the immediate circle of the court, but his brutal mode of vindicating the honour of his blood made it public at the time, and a subject for the comment of all future historians. This was the romantic adventure of Jaafer the Barmecide with the Caliph's sister, Abbasah. Haroun's attachment to Jaafer was of so extravagant a character that he could never bear him to be absent from his side, and he even went to the absurd length of having a cloak made with two collars, so that he and Jaafer could wear it at one and the same time. His love for his sister Abbasah was equally unreasonable, and in order to enjoy in unconstrained freedom the society of both his favourites, without breaking through the customary rules of etiquette and so-called morality, he conceived the idea of uniting the couple in marriage. But as he boasted that he was the only Caliph of pure Hashemi descent who had sat upon the throne, and could not brook for a moment the thought that

the pure blood of his family should be tainted by admixture with a scion of the Persian race, he extorted a solemn promise from them both that they should never meet except in his presence, and that their union should be a merely nominal one.

Jaafer thus obtained free access to the harem, and was constantly thrown into the society of the princess; but, knowing the danger of offending the Caliph, he scrupulously avoided taking notice of her. Not so the lady, who was determined that she would not be condemned to a vestal life; besides, the handsome and accomplished young Persian made a profound impression upon her. At length, by bribes and threats, she prevailed upon Jaafer's mother to bring them together, and the old lady contrived to introduce her to Jaafer as a certain slave girl procured by her for him, with the description of whose beauty and accomplishments she had already inflamed his passions. When the morning broke, and Jaafer, recovering from the effects of the wine with which his mother had plied him, recognised Abbasah, he was seized with consternation, and reproached her with having ruined them both.

However, the only thing now was to keep the secret. But their intimacy continued, and Abbasah bore two sons. As soon as they passed out of infancy, the boys were sent to Mecca to be educated, and to be kept out of the way of the Caliph.

Jaafer was a favourite with the ladies of the harem, for whom he was always ready to perform kindly offices; but he, unfortunately, omitted to conciliate the proud Zobeideh, Haroun's cousin and favourite wife, and this at length led to the discovery of the secret.

We shall see how all these circumstances combined to lead up to the final catastrophe which involved the house of Barmek in sudden and complete ruin.

Some say that the first sign of the Caliph's change towards them was that he had ordered Jaafer to kill a certain man of the family of Ali 'bn Abu Talib—namely, Yahya 'bn Abdallah, the former rebel—and that Jaafer hesitated to execute the command, and let the poor fellow escape. His failure to obey orders in this matter was reported to Haroun, who sent for Jaafer, and asked what had become of the man "He is in prison," said Jaafer. "Will you swear it by my life?" asked Alraschid. Jaafer saw that he had been betrayed, and confessed that he had allowed him to escape, because he believed him to be innocent. "You have done well," said the Caliph; "I approve entirely of your action in this matter;" but as soon as Jaafer had retired, he added, "God kill me, if I do not kill you." Jaafer had built a house, and expended an immense sum of money upon it. "See," said Alraschid, "he spends this on one house; what

must his expenses be altogether!" Their ruin is also attributed to the popularity which their courtesy and generosity had acquired for them, and some say that Fadhl and Jaafer presumed too much on the familiarity which Haroun Alraschid allowed them.

Ismail ibn Yahya, a relative of the Caliph, relates that the first spark of jealousy was kindled in Haroun's breast as he was out hunting, and Jaafer rode on with his cavalcade without waiting to escort him, while their path lay for miles through Jaafer's well-kept and fertile estates. Thereupon the following conversation occurred :—

"*Haroun.* Look at these Barmecides; we have enriched them and impoverished our own children! We have let them go on too far.

"*Ismail* (aside). By Allah! here is something wrong! (Aloud.) Why, your Majesty?

"*Haroun.* I have taken notice of the one and neglected the other. I do not know one of my sons who has an estate comparable with those of the Barmecides, in the vicinity even of the capital, to say nothing of what they have elsewhere.

"*Ismail.* O Prince of the Faithful! the sons of Barmek are your slaves, your servants—their estates and all they have are yours.

"*Haroun* (with a hard, malevolent look). Are the sons of Abbas, then, so poor that they have no wealth and no rank but what the sons of Barmek bestow?

"*Ismail.* Prince of the Faithful, look how rich many others of your servants are.

"*Haroun.* Ismail, I suspect you will repeat what I have said to them, and put them on their guard. Mind, I have mentioned it to no one else, and if it gets wind, I shall know who has betrayed my confidence. Adieu!"

Ismail left him, feeling very perturbed and anxious, and wondered how he could scheme to avert the mischief. The next morning he presented himself to the Caliph, as he was sitting in a palace overlooking the Tigris, to the east of the city (Bagdad), and immediately opposite was the palace of Jaafer, on the western bank. Noticing a large number of horses at the door, Haroun said, "With regard to what we were speaking of yesterday, just see how many troops, slaves, and cavalcades are at Jaafer's door, while no one stays at mine." Ismail said, "I conjure your Majesty, do not let such an idea enter your mind! Jaafer is only your servant, and slave, and minister, and commander of your troops; and if the troops are not to be at his door, at whose, pray, should they be?" When, later on, Jaafer presented himself, Haroun received him with the greatest cordiality, and at the end of the interview gave him two of his most intelligent private attendants to wait upon him, ostensibly as a special mark of his favour, but really as spies upon his conduct to report every

day to the Caliph. Jaafer was delighted, and did not in the least suspect the doom that was hanging over him. Three days later, Ismail called on Jaafer, and, as one of the two slaves was present, was guarded in his remarks, knowing that all he said would come to the Caliph's ears. Some time before this, the Caliph had appointed Jaafer Governor of Khorassan, and had given him an ensign and armies and sumptuous paraphernalia, so Ismail said—"Jaafer, you are going into a country extremely prosperous and wealthy. If I were you, I would make over one of my estates here to the son of the Prince of the Faithful." "Ismail," he replied, "your cousin the Caliph lives by my bounty, and it is only through us that his dynasty exists. Is it not enough that I have left him nothing to think about or trouble about, either for himself or his sons, or his suite, or his subjects, and that I have filled his treasury and heaped up wealth for him, that he must cast eyes upon what I have saved for my son and his posterity after me, that he should be affected with the envy and arrogance of the Beni Hashemi, and should be so covetous?"

"For Heaven's sake, sir," said Ismail, "do not think such a thing. The Caliph has not spoken a word to me upon the subject."

"Then what is the meaning of telling me such nonsense?" said he. "By Allah! if he asks me for any of these things, it will be the worse for him."

"After this," says Ismail, "I would neither go near him or Alraschid, for I was suspected by both parties, and said to myself, 'One is the Caliph and the other the Prime Minister; why should I interfere between them. The Barmecides, however, are, I fear, doomed.'"

One of Jaafer's mother's servants told the narrator afterwards that the slave repeated every word of the above conversations to Alraschid. The latter, when he read the note containing the particulars, shut himself up for three days, and would see nobody, but passed the time brooding over his schemes of revenge.

Other indications of the gathering storm were not wanting.

Yahya's long services and devotion had placed him upon such terms with the Caliph that he used to enter Alraschid's apartments at any hour. But when the sovereign's mind had once conceived suspicions against the family, the familiarity which he had so long permitted was resented as an impertinence, and regarded as evidence of presumptuous designs.

One day, as Haroun was seated with Bakhtishou, his physician, Yahya entered the apartment and saluted the Caliph. The latter scarcely returned the salutation, and, turning towards Bakhtishou, asked, "Does anyone come into your room without permission?" "No," replied the doctor. "Then why do they come into ours without asking?" said the Caliph. Yahya replied with sorrowful

dignity, "I have not just commenced to do this, O Prince of the Faithful; but his Majesty himself gave me special orders to enter at any moment, even when he was undressed and in bed. I did not know that the Prince of the Faithful would dislike now what he liked hitherto; but now that I do know it, I will keep whatever place you may assign to me."

Haroun was somewhat ashamed of himself, and replied, "I did not mean to hurt your feelings."

Scarcely had he left the room, however, when Haroun ordered the pages in attendance to discontinue rising on Yahya's entry, as they had been in the habit of doing. The first time that the minister entered the palace and noticed this want of respect, he perceived the cause, and changed colour.

Afterwards the pages kept out of the way when he came in, or affected not to notice him.

Bakhtishou also relates that he once paid the Caliph a visit at the Kasr el Khuld at Bagdad, and saw Haroun looking across the water at Yahya's palace, regarding attentively the crowds that came and went. "God bless Yahya," said he, "for relieving me of business and leaving me time for pleasure." But the next time he came and found the Caliph in the same position, Haroun appeared annoyed, and said, "Yahya seems to have taken all the business in hand without any reference to me. It is he who is the Caliph in reality, not I."

At length the blow fell. On the fourth day after his retirement, Haroun complained to Zobeideh, his chief wife, of what he felt, and showed her the slave's report. Now there was very ill feeling between Zobeideh and Jaafer, and had been for a long time, so that, when she once found out his secret, she followed him up to the death. "Advise me," said the Caliph, "what to do, for I fear lest the power may go out of my hands if they once take possession of Khorassan."

Said she, "You and the Barmecides are like a drunken man drowning in a great sea. If, however, you have recovered from your drunkenness, and escaped the drowning, I will tell you something much harder for you to bear than what you have heard. But if you are as infatuated with them as ever, I will let you alone." Being pressed for an explanation, she summoned one of her slaves named Arzu, who, she declared, knew all about it. Threatened with death if he remained silent, but promised pardon if he spoke the truth, Arzu related how Jaafer had really married his (Haroun's) sister, Abbasah, who had borne him children, although the Caliph had only allowed a formal ceremony of marriage to be performed between the two.

"You see," continued the vindictive woman, "what comes of allowing him to associate with the daughter of one of God's vicegerents, a woman in every way

better than he. This comes of bringing fire and faggots together."

This intelligence was a severe blow to Haroun, who possessed, as we have already remarked, all the arrogance of the Hashemi family, and prided himself on his pure Imperial descent. Unmindful of his word, therefore, he ordered Arzu to be beheaded, and, going out from Zobeideh's presence, called for his chief executioner, Mesrúr, and said, in a hard-hearted, pitiless tone, "Mesrúr, to-night, when it is dark, bring me ten masons and two servants."

The horrible story which follows shows the character of the good Haroun in a somewhat unexpected light.

Mesrúr obeyed the order, and brought at the appointed time the unlucky workmen after dark, when Alraschid rose up and preceded them to the private apartments of his sister, where he found her, and discovered the condition she was in. Without speaking one word to her, he ordered the servants to kill her, shut her up in a large box, and bury her, just as she was, under the floor of her own room. When she was dead, and the body placed in the chest, he locked it, took the key, and made the workmen dig down under the floor till they came to the water. Then he said, "That will do. Let the box down, and put the earth over it." They did so, smoothed the soil, and left the floor as it was before, the Caliph sitting on a chair all the time and looking

on. When they had finished, he turned them all out, locked up the door, and came away, taking the key with him. Then he turned to Mesrúr and said, "Take these people and give them their hire." Mesrúr, knowing what was meant, put them all into sacks, sewed them up with heavy weights inside, and threw them into the Tigris. The Caliph then gave him the key of the house, and told him to keep it until he asked for it, and to go and set up a Turkish tent in the middle of the palace: this he did, and the Caliph entered it before dawn, no one knowing what his intentions were. It was on a Thursday morning, and he sat there holding his Council. Now Thursday was Jaafer's cavalcade day. Presently he said, "Mesrúr, do not go far away from me." Then the people came in and saluted him and sat in their respective places, and Jaafer came too, and Haroun received him with the greatest cordiality, and welcomed him, and smiled upon him, and laughed and joked with him, and he sat next the Caliph. Jaafer then brought out the letters he had received from various quarters, and the Caliph listened to them, and decided upon all the petitions and claims, &c., which they contained. Then Jaafer asked to be allowed to leave for Khorassan that day, and the Caliph called for the astrologer, who was sitting near, and asked him what o'clock it was. "Half-past nine o'clock,"

answered the astrologer, and took the altitude of the sun for him; and Alraschid reckoned it up himself, and looked in his "Nautical Almanack" and said, "To-day, my brother, is an unlucky one for you, and this is an unlucky hour, and I fancy something serious is going to happen in it. However, stay over the Friday prayers, and go when the stars are more propitious; then pass the night in Nahrawan, start early the next morning, and get on the road during the day—that is better than going now." Jaafer would not agree to what the Caliph said, until he had taken the astrolabe in his own hands from the astrologer, and had taken the altitude and reckoned it up for himself. Then he said, "By Allah, you speak the truth, O Prince of the Faithful! I never saw a star burning more fiercely, or a narrower course in the zodiac than to-day." Then he went home, people of all ranks making much of him as he went. At last he reached his palace, surrounded by troops, transacted his business, and sent the crowds away. But he had hardly retired to his apartments when Alraschid sent Mesrúr, saying, "Go to him at once and bring him here, and say to him, 'A letter has just come from Khorassan.' When he comes through the first door, post the soldiers there; at the second, post the slaves. Do not let any of his people come in with him, but bring him in alone, and turn him aside to the Turkish

tent I bade you set up yesterday, and when he is inside, behead him, and bring his head to me, and do not acquaint any one of God's creatures with what I have ordered, and do not trouble me again about it. If you disobey my instructions, I will have your head cut off, and brought to me with his. Enough! Begone! Hasten, before he gets word of it from anyone else." Mesrúr went off and asked for an interview with Jaafer, who had just taken off his clothes and laid himself down to rest. On entering, he said, "Sir, the Prince of the Faithful has sent me to summon you—he was very pressing and imperious, and I dare not but obey him." "But, Mesrúr," said Jaafer, "I have only just come from his presence. What is the matter?" "Letters from Khorassan have just arrived, and you must read them," was the reply. At this Jaafer felt more comfortable, and dressed himself and put on his sword, and went with him. But when he got through the first gate and saw the soldiers, and then through the second and saw the slaves, and then through the third, he turned, and finding none of his own attendants, and seeing that he was alone in the court, he blamed himself for coming out as he did, but it was too late to retrace his steps. Then Mesrúr led him to the tent, and made him go inside and sit down as usual; but seeing no one there, he perceived that some mischief was brewing, and said, "Mesrúr, my

brother, what is the matter?" "I am your brother," answered Mesrúr, "and in your house, and you ask me what's the matter. You know well enough —your time has come. The Prince of the Faithful has ordered me to cut off your head and take it to him at once." Jaafer wept a little, and then began to kiss Mesrúr's hands and feet, and say, "Oh, my brother! oh, Mesrúr! you know how good I have been to you more than to any of the pages or members of the household, and that I always did what you asked me day and night. You know what position I hold, and what influence I have with the Prince of the Faithful, and how he entrusts me with all his secrets. Perhaps some one may have traduced me to him. I have here two hundred thousand dinars (about £100,000). I will produce them for you immediately, if you will only let me get away from here." "I cannot do it," said Mesrúr. "Then," continued the wretched victim, "take me to him—set me before him. Perchance, when his glance falls upon me, he will have some pity, and pardon me." "I cannot do it," was the reply. "I dare not go back to him. I know there is no chance for your life, not the least." But Jaafer persisted. "Oh! wait a little; go back to him and say, 'I have done what you ordered;' then listen to what he says, and come back and do as you like. But if you do that, and I am saved, I take God and the angels to witness that

I will give you half of what I possess, and make you commander-in-chief of the army. I will give you everything." And he kept on weeping and imploring him, and clinging so to life, that Mesrúr said, "Well, it may be managed." So he took off the sword and sword-belt, and set forty black slaves to guard the tent, and went to the Caliph. The latter was sitting down, perspiring with rage, holding a cane in his hand, and digging it into the ground. When he saw Mesrúr, he said, "May thy mother be bereaved of thee! What hast thou done in the matter of Jaafer?" "I have done what you ordered." "Where is his head?" "In the tent." "Fetch it me at once." So Mesrúr went back, and found Jaafer on his knees praying. He did not give him time to finish his prayer, but drew his sword and cut off his head, and took it by the beard and threw it before the Prince of the Faithful, all dripping as it was with blood. The Caliph heaved a deep sigh, and wept terribly, and dug his stick in the earth after each word that he spoke, and gnashed his teeth on the walking-stick, and addressed the head, saying—"Oh, Jaafer, did I not put you on an equality with myself? Oh, Jaafer, how have you requited me? You have neither observed my rights nor kept your pact with me. You have forgotten my bounty; you have not looked to the results of actions. You have not reflected on the vicissitudes of fortune.

You have not counted on the revolutions of time and the changes of human circumstances. Oh, Jaafer, you have deceived me in my family; disgraced me before all men. Oh, Jaafer, you have done evil to me and to yourself."

Haroun then sent to Medina for the two sons of Jaafer (who had been born to the latter by the Caliph's sister, Abbasah), and had them brought in to the palace to him. When he saw them he admired them very much, for they were very handsome lads, and he made them talk, and found they had all the polish of natives of Medina, and all the fluency and eloquence which distinguished his own—the Hashemi—family. Then he asked the eldest, "What is your name, my darling?" He said, "El Hassan." He then asked the youngest, "What is yours, my dear?" "El Husein," replied the child. And the Caliph looked at them for a long time, and wept, and then said to them, "Your beauty and innocence touch me. May God show no mercy to him who wrongs you;" and they had no idea what he intended to do with them. Then he said to Mesrúr, "What have you done with the key of the room which I gave you to take care of?" "Here it is, Prince of the Faithful." "Give it me," said Haroun. Then he sent for some slaves and servants, and ordered them to dig a deep pit in the house of Jaafer, and he called Mesrúr, and ordered him to kill

the two children, and bury them with their mother in that pit. And he was weeping all the time—"So that I thought," says Mesrúr, "that he would have had pity on them; but he wiped his eyes, and bade those about him never mention the name of the Barmecides again." After Jaafer's death, El Fadhl was summoned the same night, and imprisoned in one of Alraschid's palaces. Yahya was placed under arrest in his own house; all their property was confiscated, and more than a thousand of the Barmecide family were slain.

El Amraniy, the historian, relates a curious incident illustrating the sudden reverse of the Barmek family. A certain individual said that he happened one day to go into the Treasury office, and casting his eyes upon one of the ledgers, he noticed the entry—"For a dress of honour and decorations for Jaafer, son of Yahya, 400,000 gold dinars."[1] A few days after, he returned, and saw on the same ledger the following item—"Naphtha and shavings for burning the body of Jaafer, son of Yahya, 10 kirats;" a kirat being about the twenty-fourth part of a dinar.

The catastrophe above narrated took place on Haroun's return from Mecca, in the year 803; and it is probable that his suspicions had been aroused before he undertook the journey. Indeed, some authors say that he visited the holy cities in order to

[1] Nearly £200,000.

see the children himself, and judge from their likeness to Jaafer or his sister whether the rumour were true or no. Certain it is that the order for the executions was given by him at Ambar, on his return from Hejaz.

Jaafer's liberality to Abd el Melik ibn Salih, which we have already recorded, when he made so free with the public money and the Caliph's consent to his daughter's marriage, though perhaps thought little of at the time, would be likely to rankle in Haroun's mind, jealous as he always was of the influence of the family of Ali, and would give a keener edge to his wrath when once it was aroused against Jaafer, and would induce him to lend a readier ear to the calumnies against the latter.

But that it was to revenge a fancied indignity, and to wipe out a supposed stain upon his scutcheon, and not for political reasons, that Haroun destroyed his best friends, is proved by the following anecdote, which is related by the Arab chroniclers. When asked by one of his sisters why he had treated the Barmecides in so shocking a manner, he replied, "If this shirt I wear knew the cause, I would tear it to pieces."

Yahya's wife, who had been Haroun's foster-mother, waited upon him when she heard of her husband's arrest, and having, after much trouble, been admitted to his presence, showed him his first tooth

and a lock of his hair, which she had preserved as relics of his infancy, and besought him by these tokens of her affection to release her husband. The Caliph tried to buy them from her, but she in a rage threw them down at his feet, saying, "I will make thee a present of them!" and went out without having attained her object.

Yahya, Jaafer's father, and El Fadhl his brother, were also, as we have said, thrown into prison, but not subjected to a very rigorous confinement, being allowed to retain their personal servants and women about them. They remained in prison in comparative comfort until the arrest of Abd el Melik ibn Salih, of which I shall speak later on, when the Caliph treated them all barbarously alike.

When Yahya was told that Alraschid had killed Jaafer, he said, "So will God kill his son." "But," said the messenger, "he has ruined your house too!" "So will God ruin his house," replied the unhappy father. When Alraschid heard of this, he was much distressed; for, said he, "I never knew Yahya to say anything that did not turn out true."

The great eminence to which his family had arrived, and the uniform good fortune which they for so long enjoyed, appear often to have made Yahya, who knew his master's fickle temper, tremble lest a reverse should come. The historians relate that one day, while performing the circuit of the Ka'abeh at

Mecca (one of the ceremonies of the pilgrimage), he was heard to say—"Oh God, if it be Thy pleasure to strip me of the worldly prosperity Thou hast granted to me, to deprive me of my family and my wealth and children, deprive me of them, oh God, but oh, spare me Fadhl my son!" Then he walked away, but after a little he came back and said—"Oh Lord, how unworthy is it that one such as I am should make any reserve with Thee! My God! and Fadhl too!"

The Moslem authors look upon this incident as prophetic, for Haroun overthrew the house of Barmek shortly afterwards.

On another occasion he was heard to pray that God would visit his sins on him in this world, and not in the next, and the ruin of his family is regarded as an answer to his prayer.

On one occasion Haroun Alraschid sent Mesrúr to El Fadhl in his prison, with orders to force him to make a correct statement of his property, and deliver up any that he might have concealed. In case of his refusal he was to receive two hundred lashes. Mesrúr delivered his message to the captive, and advised him "not to prefer his riches to his own safety." El Fadhl replied with dignity—"By Allah, I have made no false statements; I would, if the choice were offered, prefer death to even one stroke of a whip, as the Prince of the Faithful well knows.

You yourself know too that we have always maintained our reputation at the expense of our wealth; how then should we now shield our wealth at the expense of our bodies? Execute your orders, if you have any!" Thereupon Mesrúr brought some whips out of a napkin which he had with him, and ordered his attendants to inflict on El Fadhl two hundred stripes. This was done with so much cruelty that the sufferer was nearly dead when the punishment was concluded. Fortunately for him, there was in the prison a man skilled in surgery, and he was at once called in to attend to El Fadhl. After making an examination of his back, he declared that his patient must have made a mistake, and that he could not have received more than fifty lashes. This was, however, only to reassure him, for he afterwards owned that a thousand could not have left worse marks. He then induced him to lie on his back on a reed-mat, trod upon his chest, and afterwards dragged him along the ground on his back till the flesh was torn away in strips. This rough mode of treatment really saved El Fadhl's life, for it restored the circulation, and formed healthy wounds which in due time healed up. El Fadhl, on his recovery, borrowed a thousand dirhems from a friend and offered them to the successful surgeon, who refused to take them. Thinking that he had offered too little, he borrowed another thousand, which the man also

refused, saying that he could not accept a fee, however large, for curing the most generous of the generous. As the doctor was really a poor man, this generosity surprised El Fadhl greatly, and he owned that it far exceeded any munificence of his own.

Yahya, the father, died suddenly in prison, in November, 805 A.D., at the age of seventy.

After his death a paper was found upon him containing the following words:—"The accuser has gone on before to the tribunal, and the accused shall follow soon. The magistrate will be that just Judge who never errs and needs no witnesses."

This was brought to Haroun, upon whom it had the effect that its writer no doubt intended, of throwing him into a fit of melancholy and abject fear.

El Fadhl, too, died in prison, of cancer of the tongue, three years after his father. It will be remembered that he was the Caliph's foster-brother, and when the latter heard of his death, he said, "My doom is not far from his!" and the event proved that he was right.

The following anecdote, related by Abd er Rahman, a member of the imperial family, who held a high ecclesiastical post at Kufa, exhibits in a touching manner the vicissitudes of this noble and unfortunate family. He says:—"Going once to visit my mother on the day of the 'Festival of Sacrifices,' I found her conversing with an elderly woman of respectable

appearance, but dressed in shabby clothes. My mother asked me if I knew who her visitor was, and on my replying that I did not, she said—'This is the mother of Jaafer the Barmecide.' I turned towards her, and, saluting her with the utmost respect, said—'Dear madame! what is the strangest thing you have ever witnessed?' 'My son,' she answered, 'there was a time when this feast found me with four hundred slaves in my escort, and yet I thought my son did not do as much for me as he ought; but now the feast has come round again, and all I want is two sheepskins, one to serve as my bed and one for me to wear.' I gave her five hundred dirhems, and she almost died for joy. She afterwards became a constant visitor at our house, till death parted us."

The Barmecides left behind them many who sincerely regretted their sad fate, but it was not often safe to mourn over the victims of the Caliph's wrath. One Ibrahim, who had been a friend of Jaafer, and received great favours at his hands, was so affected at his death, that he took to drinking, and when in his cups would weep for him, and swear to take vengeance upon his murderer. Ibrahim's own son and one of his eunuchs betrayed him to Alraschid, who sent for him, and with a great show of friendship, induced him to drink wine until he became intoxicated. Then the Caliph began himself to lament Jaafer's loss, and said that he would

rather have lost his kingdom than such a friend, declaring that he had never tasted sleep since the fatal day. At this Ibrahim shed tears, said that his highness was indeed to blame, and that they should never look on Jaafer's like again. Having thus treacherously wormed his secret out of him, Alraschid rose up with a curse, and in a few moments the imprudent sympathiser with the Barmecides was himself a corpse.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LATTER END.

THE fall of the Barmecide family, and the consequent ruin of all their dependants, made so bad an impression in Bagdad, that Haroun was induced to move his residence from that city to Rakka. Even before this, he had shown a distaste for the capital, and had chosen Kufa for his abode, but the partiality of the inhabitants for the family of Ali made this place disagreeable to him. The reasons alleged by him, and probably the true ones, for this change were the constant outbreaks in Mesopotamia; and the feeling in favour of the Ommiade party which prevailed throughout the northern provinces, made it indeed desirable that he should at least proceed there and overawe the disaffected populations with his presence.

Khorassan, the head-quarters of the Persian national party, and the hotbed of Shiah fanaticism, was always one of the most turbulent provinces in the empire. We have seen how, under Abu Moslem, it was able

to overturn the Ommiade throne, and it now seemed likely to prove equally fatal to the House of Abbas.

In the year 796, a serious revolt broke out there, headed by one Hamzeh ibn Atrak, who, after pillaging the province of Kohistan and murdering the inhabitants, at length made a stand at Bushenj. The Governor of Herat marched against him with 600 men, but was defeated and slain in the first engagement.

Ali ibn Isa, Governor of Khorassan, then sent his son, El Husein, against the insurgents with 10,000 men; but as he would not attack Hamzeh, he was removed, and his brother Isá made general in his place. He was at first unsuccessful, but ultimately succeeded in dispersing the rebel forces and killing a number of them. Hamzeh sought refuge in Kohistan with only forty followers.

Isá took a severe revenge upon those who had taken part in the insurrection, killing more than 30,000 men, and burning all the villages that had favoured the insurgents.

Hamzeh made another attempt to assert himself, but was defeated, wounded in the face, and driven to hide himself in the vineyards near Asfzar; from which he however issued, destroyed the neighbouring villages, and put all the inhabitants to the sword. Among other atrocities, he and his followers attacked a school and killed thirty boys, with their schoolmaster. Tahir

ibn Husein, afterwards a famous leader in the civil war that followed Haroun's death, and at that time Lieutenant-Governor of Bushenj, was aroused to action, and inflicted a decisive blow on the rebels. His mode of punishment was a terrible one; he caused two trees to be bent down together, and then tying a man to them, let go, and the trees, flying back to their original position, tore the unfortunate wretch in halves.

Hamzeh himself escaped, and made terms with the Government.

Ali ibn Isa now gave himself up entirely to enriching himself at the expense of the people he was sent to rule over. So flagrant were his acts of injustice, so exorbitant his extortions, and so many and urgent complaints were sent by the inhabitants of Khorassan to Alraschid, that he determined personally to investigate the matter. He accordingly summoned Ali to Rhe, whither he had proceeded with two of his sons; but the Governor brought such magnificent presents for the Caliph, that he was allowed to return to his government loaded with fresh marks of Haroun's confidence and distinction. This total disregard of their interests goaded the people of Khorassan to madness, and the feeling of dislike to their Arab masters soon ripened into one of scarcely concealed hatred.

The massacre of the Barmecide family made their

indignation still more intense, and the next rebel leader who appeared upon the scene found the whole population eager to rush to his standard. This was one Rafí ibn Leith, a grandson of Nasr ibn Sujam, who had been slain in Abu Moslem's rebellion.

The incident which led to his revolt was a romantic one, and characteristic of Mohammedan society at the period.

Rafí, a bold and handsome cavalier, had conceived an affection for the wife of a freedman of the Caliph, whose husband had deserted her, and had set up a separate establishment at Bagdad.

Failing to induce the husband to put away the lady, who had considerable property of her own, Rafí contrived to make her pretend to renounce her faith in El Islam, on which the husband divorced her with the formula which makes the dissolution of the marriage tie irrevocable, unless the woman be first married and then divorced by another person.

The Caliph, on hearing of this device, was furious, and ordered Rafí to be imprisoned and beaten, and the lady to be paraded through the streets of Samarcand with her face blackened, and seated upon a donkey. The first part of the sentence was executed, but the parties concerned managed to avoid the second.

Rafí escaped from prison not long after, and took refuge with Ali ibn Isa; but finding that his wife

was still kept away from him, he endeavoured to raise a rebellion.

The unpopularity of Ali ibn Isa had made the people ripe for a revolt, and they responded enthusiastically to Rafi's call. Ali sent his son to quell the disturbance, but he was defeated and killed. He next took the field in person, but was also repulsed. On this the movement spread with astonishing rapidity, and the people of Balkh having joined, put Ali's officers to death and sacked his palace.

Defeated at all points, he escaped to Merv, and sent word to the Caliph of what was going on. The insurgents had, however, from the first declared their loyalty to the Caliph, and maintained that their only grievance was against the Viceroy, Ali.

Haroun determined to remove the cause of their discontent; but the deposition, under the circumstances, of a powerful officer who had still money and troops at his command, could only be managed with great precaution.

For this difficult task he selected Herthemah, one of his most trusted generals, and who, being himself a Persian, knew the temper of the people with whom he would have to do.

Sending for this distinguished officer, the Caliph said—"I am about to entrust you with a mission which must be kept secret until the proper time: if your very shirt should guess it, destroy it. I

hereby appoint you Governor of Khorassan, but should Ali ibn Isa learn it, he would resist you by force of arms. Give out to the troops that you are marching to his aid; but when you reach Merv, arrest him, and compel him to make restitution of all the property which he has extorted from the people." Haroun then made out the order appointing Herthemah to the governorship, and gave him three letters to take with him. One of them was a call on the soldiery to aid the new governor in restoring order; the second was addressed to the people of Khorassan, promising them redress, and exhorting them to loyal obedience; and the third was addressed to Ali ibn Isa himself, and reproaching him in bitter terms for alienating the affection of the people from their sovereign.

Herthemah set out for Merv at the head of twenty thousand men, and Ali, who supposed that he had come to assist him, received him with the customary honours at the gate of the city. Herthemah accompanied Ali to the palace, and when they had dined, showed him the Caliph's letter. The deposed governor yielded at once, was loaded with fetters, and taken day after day to the great mosque of Merv, and compelled to answer the claims of all who demanded restitution at his hands of what he had defrauded them of.

Ali was sent on a camel without a saddle to Rakka,

all his relations and friends were arrested, and his property, consisting of about three million pounds sterling in gold and 500 camel-loads of treasure, was confiscated. This sum of course went into the Caliph's treasury, and not back into the pockets of the unfortunate Khorassanites, from whom it had been plundered. Compensation to a certain extent had, however, been made to the inhabitants of Merv, who had addressed to the Court a formal demand for repayment of the sums that Ali had extorted from them.

In the meantime, Rafí's rebellion was continually extending itself, and all Transoxania was included in the movement. Herthemah's troops refused to cross the Oxus until reinforcements came. This news being brought to the Caliph, he determined to take the field in person.

In the year 192 A.H., Alraschid set out from Rakka, to Bagdad, on the way to Khorassan, leaving his son, El Kasim, in charge of the city. On the fifth of the month Sha'ban he proceeded from Bagdad to Nahrawan, having entrusted the governorship of the ex-capital to another son, El Mamún. On the departure of the Caliph, El Fadhl ibn Sahl, a Persian, said to his master, El Mamún, "You do not know what may happen to Alraschid, and Khorassan is your own province; but your brother Emín has taken precedence of you, and the best that you can

hope from him is that he will rob you of your rights of succession, for he is the son of Zobeideh, and his relations are all of the Hashemi clan. Insist, then, that you shall go with the Caliph. This advice El Mamún took, and after some trouble obtained his request.

This Fadhl ibn Sahl was a Persian, and a protégé of the Barmecide family. He was originally a Magian by religion, but had recently become a convert to Islam. He was appointed tutor to El Mamún, and gained a complete ascendency over the young prince.

In the persons of Haroun's two sons, El Mamún and El Emín, the same conflict was to be fought out which had from the very beginning shaken the ranks of El Islam. El Mamún came of a Persian mother, while El Emín, being a son of Haroun's cousin and favourite wife, Zobeideh, was of purely Arab descent.

The question of the succession to the throne was a source of trouble to Haroun, as it had been to his predecessors, and his endeavours to settle the difficulty led to the very consequences which he was so anxious to avoid, and ultimately resulted in the disrupture and final fall of the empire.

His two eldest sons were Mohammed El Emín and Abdallah el Mamún. The first of these was not only of unmixed Arab descent, but of the Prophet's own family, the Hashemis, and was, therefore, the

natural choice of the Arab orthodox party. He had all the Arab virtues of a noble presence and undoubted personal bravery, but he entirely lacked administrative capacity, and was addicted to luxury and indolent enjoyments. Abdallah el Mamún, on the contrary, was the son of a Persian mother, and, therefore, quite as naturally enlisted the warmest sympathies of the Persian section. He was, moreover, a man of great intellectual capacity and energy.

Haroun Alraschid saw that the two brothers would be forced into a strife after his death, even if they did not themselves seek it, for the Arab party, who had triumphed on the downfall of the Barmecides, would naturally seek to strengthen their position by placing a prince upon the throne whose family traditions were all in strict accord with their own; while, on the other hand, the Persians would endeavour to regain their lost ground by the election of a Caliph with purely Persian proclivities. It was almost inevitable that the old battle between Jew and Gentile, Arab and Persian, would sooner or later be fought out in the names of the two young princes.

To avoid the threatened evil, Haroun resolved to divide the empire into two parts, leaving to Abdallah the Eastern provinces, where the Persian element prevailed, and it was arranged that he should fix his capital at Merv; while Emín had Arabia, Irak, Syria, Egypt, and Northern A

where the Arabs predominated. This carried with it the sovereignty of Bagdad, the guardianship of the holy cities, and the spiritual headship of Islam.

In the case of the death of either, the government of the entire empire was to revert to the survivor. It is needless to point out the danger of the last clause, even if the rest of the arrangement had not been so thoroughly imprudent.

When this partition was resolved upon, Haroun took his two sons on a pilgrimage to Mecca, with the view of obtaining from them a solemn ratification of the arrangement on this sacred spot.

In the Ka'abeh itself the two brothers bound themselves to respect the compact made by their father on their behalf, always religiously to observe each other's rights. The document in which these stipulations were embodied was signed by the nobles and great officers of the empire, and was suspended on the door of the Holy House. The man who was affixing it to the door allowed it to fall from his hand upon the ground, and those present did not fail to notice the unlucky omen; although, in truth, it needed no special gift of divination to foresee the result.

How severely the question exercised the mind of Alraschid the following anecdotes will show.

El Kusaï, a celebrated writer and savant of the ... relates—"I presented myself one day before

Alraschid, and, after having passed the ordinary compliments, was about to retire, when he ordered me to take a seat. As soon as the great body of the courtiers had departed, leaving only myself and a few of the Caliph's favourite attendants behind, Haroun said, 'Ali, would you like to see Mohammed and Abdallah (Emín and Mamún)?' 'Prince of the Faithful,' I replied, 'how I long to see them, and how it would please me to behold how God has blessed your Majesty in them.' Therefore he ordered them to be brought before him, and after a short delay the two young princes entered, like two stars illuminating the horizon. Affable but dignified in their demeanour, they advanced, with eyes cast down, into the middle of the room. Alraschid then placed them, Mohammed on his right and Abdallah on his left hand, and requested me to examine them in the Koran and in their other studies. They answered all my questions so readily and so politely, that their father could not conceal his pride and joy, and he dismissed them with a tender embrace. As they left, I noticed the tears running down his cheeks, and he confided to me the fears that he even then entertained of future rivalry and dissension between them."

From the very first, the Arab party sought to influence the Caliph in favour of his son Emín. The poet El Ománi once addressed him upon the subject in so stirring a speech that Haroun said, "Rejoice,

O Ománi, for Emín shall surely be my successor!" "Prince of the Faithful," he replied, "I do rejoice, as the herbage rejoices in the rain, as a barren woman rejoices in a son, and as a sick man rejoices in his new-found health. He is a peerless prince, who will defend his honour, and resemble his ancestors." "What," asked Haroun, "do you think of his brother Abdallah?" "Good pasture," said the other, "but not like the saadán."[1] "God slay this man for an Arab of the desert!" said Haroun; "how well he knows how to urge me on! As for me, by Allah, I find in Abdallah the resolution of El Mansúr, the piety of El Mehdí, and the pride of El Hádi; and, by Allah, if I dared to compare him to a fourth (*i.e.*, to the prophet), he would deserve it."

El Asma'i also recounts that one day he found the Caliph in a state of extraordinary agitation, at one moment sitting down, at another throwing himself at full length on the couch. As the visitor entered the room, Haroun burst into tears, and murmured—

> "Let him alone o'er nations rule
> Whose mind is firm, whose heart is pure;
> Avoid the vacillating fool
> Whose thoughts and speech are never sure."

On hearing this, El Asma'i knew that the Caliph

[1] Saadán is a thorny plant said to be extremely fattening for cattle. The expression is proverbial.

was intent on some important project, and the fact was soon proved by his sending Mesrúr to summon Yahya before him. When the aged minister arrived, Haroun said, "O Abu l Fadhl,[1] the prophet of God, on whom be peace, died without a testament, when Islam was yet in the vigour of youth, and the faith was fresh. The Arabs were united, and God had granted security and honour after peril and abasement. Then followed the quarrels for the succession, with the melancholy results you wot of. For me, I intend to regulate my succession, and to let it pass into the hands of one whose character and conduct I approve, and of whose political capacity I am assured. Such an one is Abdallah (Mamún); but the Beni Hashem incline to Mohammed (Emín) to further their own desires, capricious, extravagant, and sensual though they know him to be, and ever subject to the influence of women. Now, if I show my preference for Abdallah, I let loose against me the hatred of the house of Hashim; but if I make Mohammed my only heir, I fear it will bring trouble on the State." After a long deliberation, the compromise to which I have already alluded was decided upon. Zobeideh used all her influence with her husband in favour of her son, and complained bitterly

[1] Mohammedans usually receive a familiar name after their eldest son; the prophet Mohammed, for example, is known as Abu l Kasim, from an infant son who died.

that the Caliph had refused him the military subsidies which he had accorded to his brother. "Who are you," said Alraschid, angrily, "to judge of my acts? Thy son has a peaceable province, while Abdallah has one in a state of war, wherein he has more need of troops and money. I have no fear that Abdallah will harm your son; but I greatly fear that your son will be a source of danger to him."

The state of the Caliph's health when he set out for Khorassan made it necessary for the respective partisans of the two young princes to be on the alert, and the two parties were only awaiting the sovereign's decease to open the game. They had not long to wait.

Alraschid had not proceeded far upon his way when he said to his aide-de-camp, Es Sabah et Tabarî, "I do not think you will see me much longer, for you do not know what I feel!" Es Sabah tried to reassure him, but he turned aside to rest beneath a tree, and bade his attendants leave him. Then he uncovered himself, and showed his companion a silk bandage with which he had bound himself about. "I suffer," said he, "terribly; but I dare not let anyone know it, for all about me are spies from one or other of my sons. Mesrúr watches me on the part of El Mamún, and Gabriel ibn Bakhtishou on the part of El Emín, and there is not one that does not count my breaths, and measure the time I have to live. To

prove this to you, I will call for a horse, and you will see that they will bring me a sorry jade to make me worse; but do not speak of this again." Es Sabah uttered a prayer that the Caliph's life might be spared; but when the horse was brought, it turned out exactly as the Caliph had foretold. The latter merely gave one look at Es Sabah, and mounted without a word.

This anecdote shows plainly how miserable were, after all, the latter days of the great and glorious Alraschid. Intoxicated with selfishness and inordinate pride, he had destroyed his best friends, alienated the affection of his kinsmen, and had instilled fear rather than love into the hearts of his subjects. He knew that his two sons were watching eagerly for his death, ready to rend each other like two dogs over his inheritance; and the mighty Caliph, whose nod could shake an empire, dared not reveal even to his own physician the painful malady from which he was suffering, or ask his attendants for another and a better horse.

During this expedition the Caliph never ceased to complain of his ministers, and, in spite of himself, to show how much he missed the clear counsels and the prompt action of the Barmecides.

After crossing the heights of Hulwan, he halted at Kermanshah and harangued his troops. "There have been troubles," said he, "both in the East and

West. The West is now quieted, and I shall know how to quiet the East also, although Yahya and his sons are no more with me to lend me aid."

He was accompanied by his new Vizier, El Fadhl ibn er Rabía.

This man's father had been Vizier to El Mehdi, Haroun's father, and he himself had continued to hold office during the short reign of El Hadi. On Haroun's accession to the throne, he was superseded by Yahya the Barmecide. He had, moreover, been treated with uniform contumely by Yahya and all his family, and had therefore but little cause to love them. On the destruction of the Barmecides, he was appointed Prime Minister, and recognised as the leader of the Arab party.

On his arrival in the neighbourhood of Tûs, the Caliph still endeavoured to conceal his weakness and fatigue, but he grew at length so prostrate that he was obliged to be carried by his attendants. His condition made a great commotion among all ranks of his army, perceiving which, Haroun insisted upon attempting to ride, that the soldiers might see him and regain confidence. Having unsuccessfully tried to mount first a charger, then a hack, and afterwards an ass, he cried out, " Take me back, take me back! By Allah, the men are right!"

Gabriel ibn Bakhtishou, his physician, tells us that one day he came in to the Caliph while the latter

was at Rakka, and found him quite prostrate, and scarcely able to open his eyes or to move. Being asked the cause of his illness, Haroun related a vision he had had that night, which weighed terribly upon his spirits ; he fancied that an arm and hand, which he recognised, but whose owner's name he had forgotten, protruded itself from under his bed, and showed him some red earth, while the voice of some unseen person cried, 'This is the soil of the land in which you will be buried.' Haroun asked the name of the country, and was told, 'Tûs.' Gabriel endeavoured to assure him that it was nothing but a dream arising from a disordered stomach, and from too much pondering upon the revolted state of that part of his dominions, and ordered the Caliph rest and recreation, which soon dispelled all recollection of the unpleasant incident.

But it was in the red earth of Tûs that the Caliph was to be buried. While engaged on this expedition against Rafí ibn Leith, Haroun, halting one day at a village in Tûs, suddenly staggered to his feet in great excitement, but was unable to stand. His wives and attendants crowding round, he said to Bakhtishou, "Do you remember my vision about Tûs at Rakka ?" Then slightly raising his head, he looked at Mesrúr, and bade him bring him some of the earth of the garden in which he was encamped. Mesrúr returned with a little of the garden soil in his open palm, and

held it out to Alraschid, who shrieked out, "This is the hand and arm I saw in my dream, and this is the self-same red earth!" and gave way to uncontrollable emotion, weeping and sobbing like a child.

While in this pitiful condition, Bashír, brother of the rebel leader, Rafí, was brought a prisoner into the camp. Alraschid ordered him to be brought into his presence.

"If I had no more time left me to live," said he, "than would suffice to move my lips, I would say kill him!"

Then sending for a butcher, he caused the prisoner to be hacked to pieces, limb from limb, alive, before his eyes.

When the horrible sentence was executed, the Caliph fainted away.

This was the last public act of the "good Haroun Alraschid!"

On coming to himself, he knew that his last hour was quickly drawing nigh, and bade his attendants dig a grave for him in the house in which he was then staying, and sent for a number of readers, who intoned the whole of the Koran in his presence, all reciting together different chapters; the dying Caliph lying in the meantime in a sort of litter on the brink of his own grave.

After one of the fainting fits that immediately

preceded his death, he opened his eyes, and, looking towards his vizier, he said, "O Fadhl!

"And has the time I dreaded come at last?
Ay, all men's eyes are staring now on me;
Those pity me who envied in times past.
Let us be patient; what will be, will be!
I weep for friends I loved in times of yore,
For fleeting joys that come again no more!"

During his last moments, he called for a thick blanket, and insisted upon Sahl ibn Sáid, the attendant who was watching by him, being covered with it. Presently a paroxysm of pain supervened, and Sahl jumped up; but the Caliph bade him lie down again, and would not allow him to wait upon him. Presently he called out, "Where are you, Sahl?" The other answered, "Here; but though I am reclining, my heart will not let me rest while the Prince of the Faithful is suffering so much." At this Alraschid burst out into a hearty laugh—"Sahl," said he, "remember in a moment like this what the poet has said—

'Descended from a race so great,
I firmly bear the hardest fate.'"

This was his last effort, and shortly after, he breathed his last in the presence of El Fadhl, his vizier, Mesrúr, his chief executioner and constant attendant, and one or two other members of his court.

Haroun's last instructions were that the vizier should make over to Mamún all the troops and money which were with him, in order that he might effectually repress the rebellion in Khorassan, and take peaceable possession of his share of the empire.

The minister, however, had the interests of his own party too much at heart, and, as soon as Haroun Alraschid was buried, he marched hastily back to Bagdad to join Emín, paying no heed to the remonstrances of Mamún, who sent an envoy to stop him.

Mamún was furious at this defection of Fadhl ibn er Rabí, and he had at his side Fadhl ibn Sahl, whose devotion to the Persian cause was only equalled by his hatred to his namesake, Emín's vizier. This man pointed out to his master that he must prepare for a decisive struggle, and that his brother had, by his minister's act in depriving him of his troops, really aimed a blow at his succession to that part of the inheritance which his father had left him. He also reminded him of the powerful influence which Persia had exercised in the elevation of the Abbasides to power in Abu Moslem's days, and, in fine, urged him to strengthen his position by conciliating the Persian people, and then to aim at grasping the whole and undivided sovereignty for himself.

To this advice Mamún gave a not unwilling ear.

He made peace with the Khorassan rebels, and endeavoured by every means in his power to ingratiate himself with his new subjects. He was, however, astute enough not to break openly with his brother, but to wait until the latter should commit some overt act of hostility towards him, which would make action on his part seem to be simply in the interests of justice and his own self-defence.

He had not long to wait. Urged on by El Fadhl ibn Rabí, Emín first set aside the succession to the Caliphate of Mamún in favour of his infant son Mousa, next ordered the omission of Mamún's name in the public Friday prayer; and finally sent a mission to Mamún demanding the cession of three of his provinces. This last demand was refused point blank, and war was then rendered inevitable.

Emín, stimulated by the blindly fanatical partisanship of his vizier, released Ali 'bn Isa from prison, placed him at the head of the army, and conferred upon him the governorship of Khorassan, which he was to take possession of on his obtaining the victory over Mamún. This appointment was the only thing wanting to consolidate the power of the latter; for the Persians who were on his side not only had their old grudge against the Arabs to revenge, but they found themselves once more threatened with the tyranny of a man, to get rid of whose exactions they had spent their very life's blood. Meantime, an immense force

was placed under Ali's command ; Zobeideh, Emín's mother, presented the general with a set of silver chains with which to bring back Mamún captive ; and Emín accompanied the army for the first eight miles of their march from Bagdad.

It is not my intention to enter into a detailed account of the civil war of which this contest is the opening scene ; suffice it to say, that after a brief struggle Mamún triumphed, Bagdad was besieged and taken, and Emín himself captured and slain.

Haroun Alraschid left behind him an immense sum of money (according to some authorities, no less than 900 millions dinars—400 millions sterling !), besides lands and slaves, in all an extraordinary treasure, considering his lavish generosity and unlimited expenditure.

This wealth, only to be compared with the accumulations of some of the Byzantine emperors, enables us to form some idea of the enormous sums that came into the imperial coffers. This money was not always honestly come by. Not only did the provinces suffer such severe exactions that one or other of them was always in a state of insurrection, but his generals and lieutenant-governors were frequently forced to give up their hoards, and the property of private individuals was often not respected.

As an instance of the Caliph's high-handed proceedings in this respect, we may quote the case of

Mohammed, son of Suleiman, a cousin of Mansúr, who died at Basrah in A.D. 789.

Immediately on his decease, Alraschid sent to confiscate the enormous property which he had left behind him. The agents seized on what they thought suitable for the Caliph, including sixty millions in money; and Haroun, on receiving this vast amount, made large presents to his boon companions and musicians, and laid up the remainder in his treasury.

The pretext of which Alraschid availed himself to confiscate Mohammed's property was afforded by the latter's brother, Jaafer ibn Suleiman. He had calumniated the deceased through envy, and had assured the Caliph that he had not an estate or any property that he had not mortgaged for more than its value to procure funds to assist him in his designs on the Caliphate, and declared that under these circumstances the Commander of the Faithful would be justified in appropriating it. Alraschid kept all Jaafer ibn Suleiman's letters, and when Mohammed died, and Jaafer, who was the only uterine brother he had, would have inherited all this wealth, Haroun adduced his own letters against him, and seized the property.

Another victim of Alraschid's jealousy was Mousa ibn Jaafer, a lineal descendant of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. One of Mousa's kinsfolk, who

had an enmity against him, reported to Alraschid that people used to pay him, Mousa, a fifth of their property, looking upon him as the legitimate Imám. He further declared that Mousa was contemplating an insurrection. These tales, repeatedly brought to Alraschid, at length made a profound impression on him, and caused him deep anxiety. The informer was rewarded with a large sum of money, the payment of which was charged upon the provincial revenues. The traitor did not, however, live to enjoy the fruits of his treachery, but was presently seized with a violent illness, of which he died. Sudden and fatal illnesses were not uncommon with those whose presence caused the Caliphs any anxiety.

The first ostensible cause of Alraschid's resentment against Mousa was that, being on a pilgrimage to the sacred cities, he went to Medina, and on entering the shrine where the Prophet is buried, he said, "Peace be upon thee, O apostle of God, O my cousin!" adding the last words by way of boasting his superiority over those who stood round him.

Upon this, Mousa, who was also present, then advanced and said, "Peace be on thee, O my father!" in allusion to his own lineal descent from the Prophet through his daughter Fatima.

At this Haroun's face changed, and he said, "This is a very strong boast, O Mousa!" After this he took Mousa with him to Irak, and threw him into

prison in the house of Es Sindí. Here he was subsequently put to death by order of the Caliph. This was done secretly, for fear of the effect which it might have upon the public, with whom Mousa was a great favourite, both on account of his personal character and of his direct descent from Ali. In order to avoid scandal, a jury of notables was impanelled to examine into the causes of the death. They testified that the prisoner had died a natural death.

Abd el Melik ibn Salih, a member of the house of Abbas, and therefore a near kinsman of the Caliph, also fell under the royal displeasure. He had a son named Abd er Rahman, after whom he was called, according to a prevalent Moslem custom, Abu (or father of) Abd er Rahman. This unnatural son conspired with one Camamah, a secretary, to persuade Haroun that his father was harbouring designs upon the Caliphate. He was accordingly arrested, and confined in the house of Rabí ibn Fadhl, the vizier.

One day Haroun sent for the prisoner, and taunted him with base ingratitude, and with having repaid the favours and honours which had been heaped on him with treacherous designs against his master. "No, Prince of the Faithful," answered Abd el Melik. "Had I done so, I should have been made to repent it, as it would have been lawful to take revenge on me. You, O Prince of the Faithful! are the vicegerent of God's Prophet over His people. It is our

duty to obey you, and to give you good advice; and it is your duty to the people to rule them justly and pardon their faults."

"Ah," said Alraschid, "you are humble with your tongue and ambitious with your mind; here is your secretary, Camamah, who testifies to your treachery."

"Nay," said Abd el Melik, "he cannot surely traduce and calumniate me about what he knows nothing of."

Camamah was then brought up, and Alraschid bade him speak without fear or hesitation, whereupon he declared that Abd el Melik was meditating treachery and rebellion against the Caliph.

"No wonder," cried Abd el Melik, "that he has told lies behind my back, for he is calumniating me to my very face!"

"There is your son Abd er Rahman too," said Alraschid; "he will testify to your ambitious projects. If I wished to convict you, I could not have better testimony than these two."

"As for my son," answered the prisoner, "he is either acting under orders, or he is a rebellious child. If he is acting under orders, there is some excuse for him; and if he is rebellious, then he is an ungrateful scoundrel; God Himself warns us against such persons when He says, 'And amongst your very wives and children ye have enemies, so beware of them."

On this Alraschid jumped up and cried out, "Your case is as clear as day, but I will not act hastily. God shall judge between us!"

"I am content," said Abd el Melik, "to have God for my judge, and the Prince of the Faithful to execute His judgment, assured that he will not prefer his own wrath to his Lord's commands."

On another occasion the Caliph sent for his prisoner, and addressed him in the following words:—

"I desire that he should live, but he desires that I should die;
Beware of those who seem thy friends; 'tis there that base intentions lie.

By Allah, methinks I see the rain of blood falling with its lowering cloud; already the threatening lightning flashes before my eyes; and as the storm ceases, I see left on the ground wristless hands and neckless heads! But gently, gently, ye sons of Hashim! I have smoothed your difficulties and cleared your muddy stream, and the reins of circumstances are in your hands; but beware, beware before a crisis comes that shall cause hands to fail and feet to fall!"

"Nay," said Abd el Melik, "fear God, O Commander of the Faithful! in the matter of His subjects whom He hath entrusted to your care. Do not show ingratitude in place of thanks, nor punishment where reward is due. I have always given you sincere

advice; I have shown unreserved obedience to you; I have propped up your empire where it showed signs of weakness with supports as firm as Mount Yelemlim; I have given your enemies plenty to think of. God help me, and commend my life to your mercy, which you may not withdraw after having once shown it, and all for mere suspicion, which the Scriptures say is a sin, or for some rebel who gnaws flesh, by Allah! and laps blood. By Allah! I have smoothed your difficulties, and made your affairs easy. I have made all men's hearts content to obey you. How many a whole night have I spent working for you; in how many a strait have I stood up for you!"

To this burst of eloquent appeal Haroun only replied, "By Allah! if it were not for the honour of the Beni Hashem, I would cut off your head!" with which speech he sent him back to prison.

A short time after, however, at the intercession of another member of his family, the despot consented to relax the rigour of his treatment. Abd el Melik remained in confinement until the death of Alraschid, when Emín released him from prison, and gave him the government of Syria.

Out of gratitude to his liberator, he took a solemn oath that, if Emín were killed during his lifetime, he would never own allegiance to Mamún; he died, however, before his master.

On one occasion Alraschid said to Abd el Melik,

"You are not descended from Salih at all." "From whom, then?" asked he. "From Merwán," replied the Caliph. "Well," was the answer, "I do not care which blood of two such thoroughbred sires prevails in my veins!"

After the fall of the Barmecides, Haroun sent one day to Yahya in his prison, and promised to reinstate him in his former position if he would tell him the truth about Abd el Melik's rebellious projects.

Yahya replied, "By heaven, I never noticed anything of the kind in Abd el Melik; but if I had, I should have stood between him and you, for your kingdom and authority were mine, and all my prosperity or adversity depended upon your own; how, then, is it likely that Abd el Melik would have applied to me to help him? If you have treated me as you have done, do you not think that he would in that case have treated me worse? For God's sake, do not suspect me of such a conspiracy. I saw only that he was a fit and proper person, such as I was glad to find amongst your own family, and I therefore gave him his appointment, and was well satisfied with his conduct. It was only his education, and the dignity with which he supported his position, which inclined me so in his favour."

When Haroun received this reply, he sent back the messenger with the brutal threat that, if Yahya did not confess the truth, he would kill his son, El Fadhl.

Yahya merely replied, with his usual dignity, "You have us in your power; do as you please!" The messenger, on hearing this, told El Fadhl, and an affecting but stoical parting took place between father and son. "Are you pleased with me, father?" "Yes; may God be the same!" El Fadhl was then led away as if for execution, but as the Caliph was utterly unable to find anything against Yahya, he was allowed to rejoin the latter after three days.

The lady Zobeideh, Haroun's cousin and favourite wife, was in no way behind her husband in either piety or magnificence. She retained a hundred slave girls, who knew the Koran by heart, and whose only business was to intone it; each of these repeated a tenth of the book every day, so that the palace in which she resided was filled like a hornet's nest with a continual humming.

It was through her munificence that the holy city of Mecca was for the first time properly supplied with water, which was before extremely scarce, especially at the time of the great annual pilgrimages, when a single waterskinful often cost as much as a dinar. She also caused wells to be sunk along the roads leading to the city, and caravanserais to be built for the accommodation of the pilgrims.

Her household was conducted on a most magnificent scale; her meals were always served upon gold and silver plate, instead of the simple Arab *sufrah*,

or leathern tray, which was in vogue before her time, even with persons of the highest rank; and the litters in which she was borne abroad were constructed of ebony and sandal-wood, richly carved and ornamented with silver. She also organised a bodyguard of slave girls, attired as pages, who attended her wherever she went; and the fashion she thus set was followed by all the rich men and exquisites of Bagdad.

In judging of Haroun's character, we must not merely adopt the modern standard of virtue, but must take into account the political opinions of the time. He believed, more than any Chambord or Carlos, in his divine right; for was he not the successor of the Apostle of God, and His vicegerent upon earth!

He thought, and all agreed with him, that he had a perfect right to put any suspected person to death, for to question his authority was to rebel against Islam itself, and incur the dreaded charge of infidelity.

Jaafer himself probably never disputed Haroun's right to put him to death, and certainly no one else would do so, however much the people generally might lament the sentence, or in their own minds doubt the propriety of its execution.

I have in the previous pages related all that is known from authentic sources of Haroun Alraschid's

public and political career. Hitherto we have found him very unlike the merry monarch of the Arabian Nights, but it must be remembered that he is there depicted only under circumstances wherein he was subjected to the genial influence of his companions the Barmecides, and when free from the cares and responsibilities of state.

I will now, by relating some of the anecdotes concerning him, with which Eastern writings abound, endeavour to throw some light upon his private life.

CHAPTER V.

THE CALIPH OF THE LEGEND.

THE name of Haroun Alraschid is so associated with the *Arabian Nights*, that it is to that work we naturally turn for the lighter incidents in his career. The book is, however, somewhat disappointing in this respect to the English reader, at least partly, because the Caliph there plays a quite subordinate part, his adventures forming a mere setting to the other stories; this is in great measure owing to the fact that so many of the anecdotes connected with him depend for their point either on some untranslateable verbal quibble or more than equivocal joke. The old-fashioned edition, made from Galland's French version, which is most generally read, does not give a very good idea of the original, nor does it present so faithful a picture of Oriental life as the more recent translation by Lane. Some of the stories, too, are interpolated. It will shock many people, for instance, to learn that two of the most favourite tales, "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp"

and "Ali Baba, or the Forty Thieves," are not in the original Arabic text. The latter I have myself found current under a slightly different form among the Bedawin of Sinai, but it is doubtful whether "Aladdin" is an Eastern story at all. The life as depicted in the *Arabian Nights* is that of an Arab town; but many of the stories contained in the book are evidently borrowed from other and probably Persian sources.

I need not reproduce any of these old familiar tales in full, especially as most of them are pure fiction, or at least old stories with Haroun Alraschid's nightly wanderings in Bagdad used as a setting. In that of the "Porter," the "Ladies of Bagdad," and the "Three Calendars," the Caliph merely plays the part of a listener to the narratives of the others, and, by way of rounding off the story, assists at the *dénouement*, and marries one of the principal actresses. This tale, or rather series of tales, is simply one of enchantment, and at the end the Caliph himself has an interview with a *jinníyeh*, or "controlling spirit," who, being a Mohammedan, salutes him as the spiritual head of the faith.

Fairy stories are of course as common in the East as in Europe, but the supernatural element is somewhat different. The Persian Peri and the English Fairy are one and the same, so far as the etymology of the word goes; but the fallen angel of Persian

fable, always yearning for the Paradise she has lost, is quite a different being from the little elf of Northern superstition. In Arab folk-lore the mysterious agent is either a *Jinn—i.e.*, a monstrous being with superhuman powers, created out of fire instead of earth, but otherwise resembling man—or else it is an *Afreet*, an embodiment of all that is fierce, grotesque, and horrible, but often posssesing a rude and mischievous sense of fun, like our own English Puck. Other superstitious creations the Arabs have—for example, the *Hâmah* or *Sadá*, that is, the unquiet ghost of a murdered man issuing from the head of the corpse, and crying for vengeance; the Ghoul, a mixture of cannibal and vampire, familiar to the readers of the *Arabian Nights;* and the mythical creature consisting only of the front longitudinal half section of a human being, which is so firmly believed in that many authors gravely assert that the people of Yemen hunt them and use them for food. Witches and wizards, who obtain control of these supernatural powers, are of course common enough in Arabian stories, the great source of all magical schools being a certain pit at Babylon, where the two fallen angels —Hárút and Márút—are suspended by the heels until the Day of Judgment, but are always willing to impart a knowledge of sorcery to anyone who will consult them.

The tale of the three apples, where a fisherman,

casting in his net "for the Caliph's luck," brings up the dead body of a young woman, and Haroun threatens Jaafer with crucifixion unless he discovers the murderer, may relate to an incident which actually happened, but has little personal connection with the subject of our history.

The story of Nooreddín and Enees el Jelees, or, as the older version has it, the Fair Persian, is another in which Haroun Alraschid figures. While on his barge upon the Tigris, he notices with surprise that the grand saloon of one of his own pleasure palaces is brilliantly lighted up. Going there secretly to ascertain the cause, he finds the keeper of the palace, a Sheikh hitherto renowned for his learning and piety, indulging in a drunken orgie with a young man and his slave girl, who were flying from the vengeance of the local governor. Climbing up a tree with Jaafer to watch them, the Caliph sees the Sheikh Ibrahim bring a lute—the private instrument of the favourite court singer—and hand it to the girl. "By Allah!" said he to Jaafer, "if she sing not well, I will crucify you all; but if she sing well, I will pardon them and crucify thee." To this reassuring speech Jaafer replied, "O Allah! let her not sing well!" "Why?" asked the Caliph. "That thou mayest crucify all of us," said Jaafer, "and then we can console each other!" The damsel, however, sang and played in so enchanting a manner that Haroun's

wrath was appeased, and he desired to join them incognito. This he effected by borrowing the clothes of a fisherman who was poaching in the grounds, and, introducing himself to the Sheikh and his companions, sold them some fish, which he cooked with his own hands, and was invited to join the party. How the young man turns out to be the son of the late Vizier of the Sultan of Basra, and after many subsequent adventures, in the course of which he narrowly escapes falling a victim to the machinations of his rival, and ultimately lives happily with his slave girl in Haroun's service, the reader will find told at length in the *Arabian Nights.*

Other well-known incidents in the same work are the story of "The False Caliph," who took advantage of Haroun's well-known *penchant* for incognito nocturnal rambles to personate him and amuse himself in a state barge on the Tigris, and was at length discomfited by falling in with the monarch himself in disguise; and the story of "The Sleeper Awakened" (found in almost every known language), which is identical with that of Shakspere's Christopher Sly in the prologue to "The Taming of the Shrew."

Two anecdotes which are elsewhere related of Haroun's justice and sagacity sound somewhat strange to a Christian ear. A pieman was convicted before him of making his pies of meat unfit for human food,

and was sentenced to have his ear nailed to the door-post of his shop, and all his pies thrown outside the city gates. A baker also, who had been detected in adulterating his bread and giving short weight, was condemned to be burnt alive in his own oven, and his shop was razed to the ground. Jaafer, the Vizier, ventured afterwards to remonstrate with the Caliph upon the severity of the sentence. "I have perhaps been a *little too hasty*," said Haroun; and ordered Jaafer to prepare some new police regulations for the control of the tradesmen of the city.

The Oriental notion of a monarch's right over the life of a subject is somewhat startling. On one occasion a Jew astrologer had predicted that the Caliph Haroun Alraschid would die within the year, and the Sovereign was much exercised about the prophecy, and refused to be comforted. At last Yahya, his Vizier and Jaafer's father, undertook to quiet the royal mind. Sending for the Jew, he asked him how long he (the astrologer himself) would live. The Jew replied that his art told him that he would reach a ripe old age. "Will the Commander of the Faithful order him to be immediately executed?" asked Yahya. "Oh! certainly," said the Caliph; and the wretched man's head was struck off then and there. "Your Majesty now sees the value of the fellow's predictions," said Yahya; and the historians who narrate the event seem to think it not

only a smart thing on the minister's part, but a really humane and laudable action. For all that, Oriental moralists deemed it an important part of their functions to impress a sense of duty on their sovereigns, and an apposite story was often found a convenient method of conveying advice which, if offered too directly, might have cost the Mentor his head.

Haroun Alraschid suffered much from sleeplessness, and, to divert himself, would either walk incognito through the streets of Bagdad, accompanied by his trusty companions, Jaafer and Mesrúr, or he would recline and listen to amusing stories or sentimental poetry. This furnishes really the motive for a great part of the tales of the *Arabian Nights*, many of the histories there related being told to soothe the Caliph in his restless moods.

During one of these fits, he said to Jaafer, "I am sleepless to-night, and my heart is contracted, and I know not what to do." On this, Mesrúr, who was standing by, burst out laughing, and Haroun sharply asked, "Dost thou laugh at me, or art thou mad?" "No, by Allah! O Commander of the Faithful!" said the eunuch; "by thy relationship to the Chief of the Apostles, I could not help it. It was the sudden recollection of a man, named Ibn el Karibee, whom I saw yesterday amusing a crowd on the banks of the Tigris, which made me laugh, for which I humbly beg your Majesty's pardon." "Bring him

here at once," said Alraschid; and Mesrúr, having found the wag, brought him to the palace; but, before admitting him, bargained with him that he should give him two-thirds of whatever he might receive from the Caliph. To this Ibn el Karibee agreed after much wrangling, and the two were ushered into the imperial presence.

After the usual ceremonious greeting, the Caliph said, "If you do not make me laugh, I will beat you three times with this leathern bag," pointing to one which lay beside him. The fellow, who was not without experience of correction from more formidable-looking instruments—having, indeed, more than once brought himself into personal communication with the bastinado—thought but little of three blows with a leathern bag, and put forth all his strength to divert the Sovereign, uttering drolleries enough to make a melancholy madman laugh; but not a muscle of the Caliph's face was seen to move. "Now," said the Commander of the Faithful, "you have deserved the beating;" and, taking up the leathern bag, struck the jester one blow therewith, eliciting a howl, for the bag was filled with large pebbles, and caused no trifling pain. Begging for a moment's respite, he told Haroun of the bargain between himself and Mesrúr, and begged that the two remaining blows might be given to the eunuch as his share, according to agreement. Mesrúr was then called in,

and on receiving the first instalment cried out, "O Prince of the Faithful! the third is enough for me, give him the two-thirds!" This restored the Caliph's good temper, and, laughing heartily, he rewarded them both.

Many of the smaller anecdotes in the *Arabian Nights* and the works of the native chroniclers, though often humorous in the extreme, it is impossible to quote; they exhibit the great personages of the Court in a very unfavourable light, and the morality of Alraschid and his satellites would appear to have been exceptionally low, even for these licentious times. At the same time, we must make allowance for the fact that Abu Nawwâs, the hero or narrator of most of the stories, was a licensed jester, and in all probability often grossly exaggerated the accounts given him, either by the Caliph himself or the attendants, of incidents occurring in the Imperial harem.

The stories told of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid and Abu Nawwâs are innumerable. One is, that the two were disputing one day as to the truth of an axiom laid down by Abu Nawwâs, that "an excuse was often worse than the crime," and the poet offered to convince the monarch of it before the night was over. The Caliph, with a grim humour peculiarly his own, promised to take off the jester's head if he failed to do so, and went out in a rage. After a

while, Haroun came in a somewhat surly temper to his harem, and the first thing that greeted him was a kiss from a rough-bearded face. On calling out violently for a light and an executioner, he found that his assailant was Abu Nawwâs himself.

"What on earth, you scoundrel, do you mean by this conduct?" asked the enraged Sovereign. "I beg your Majesty's most humble pardon," said Abu Nawwâs, "I thought it was your Majesty's favourite wife." "What!" shrieked Haroun; "why, the excuse is worse than the crime." "Just what I promised to prove to your Majesty," replied Abu Nawwâs, and retired, closely followed by one of the Imperial slippers.

Another incident in which Abu Nawwâs worsted his Royal master is the following:—The Caliph was seated in his *diván*, with his *nudamá*, or equerries, around him, intent upon an evening's amusement. Abu Nawwâs, however, had not arrived, and the Caliph devised a clever plan for punishing him for being late. He arranged a game at forfeits, in which the rule was to be that every one who did exactly as he did should receive a dinar—about half-a-sovereign; but anyone who failed to keep up the game was to receive a dozen strokes of the bastinado. Haroun then ordered in some eggs, and, putting one under his own cushion, commanded his followers to do the same, and they had scarcely completed their preparations when the missing poet came in. The Caliph

began the game, and having proposed to Abu Nawwâs to join, began clucking like a hen, and produced an egg. Each of the courtiers did the same, and it came at last to Abu Nawwâs's turn. With all eyes fixed on him with a wicked stare, he stalked into the middle of the room, flapped his arms against his sides, and crowed loudly "Cock-a-doodle doo," to indicate that he alone was cock of the walk.

Another ridiculous story is told of Abu Nawwâs, that the Caliph once bought his beard of him for a sum of money down, and allowed him to keep it till it should be wanted. The poet having subsequently done something to offend him before the whole court, Haroun cried out warningly, "Mind your beard!" "Thank Allah!" said Abu Nawwâs, "it is mine again, since the Commander of the Faithful says so!" This reminds us of the courtier who, having been inadvertently *tutoyé* by a King of Spain, immediately put on his hat. The monarch, in a rage, demanded how he dared to take such a liberty. "Sire," was the reply, "I must be a grandee of Spain, or his Majesty would not have addressed me so familiarly. I therefore stand upon my privileges;" and a patent of nobility was of course made out for him.

Abu Nawwâs's ready wit saved him on more than one occasion from more serious consequences than a beating. The Caliph, who was himself much addicted

to drinking and otherwise violating the precepts of the Koran, one day in a fit of virtuous indignation ordered Abu Nawwâs to be executed then and there.

"Are you going to kill me," asked the poet, "out of mere caprice?" "No," said Haroun Alraschid; "but because you deserve it." "But," pleaded the poor fellow, "God Almighty first calls sinners to account, and then pardons them. How have I deserved death?" "For that verse of poetry of yours in which you say—

"'Oh, prithee, give me wine to drink, and tell me it is wine!
Let me have no concealment, when plain dealing may be mine.'"

"And do you know, O Commander of the Faithful," asked Abu Nawwâs, "whether they gave me it, and I did drink?" "I suspect so," said the Caliph. "And would you kill me on suspicion, when the Koran says, 'some suspicion is a sin'?" "You have written other things," said Haroun, "which deserve death. That atheistic verse of yours, for instance—

"'None has e'er come back to tell
If he in Heaven or Hell doth dwell.'"

"And has anyone come back to tell us?" asked the poet. "No," said the monarch. "Then surely you would not kill me for telling the truth!" said Abu Nawwâs. "But, besides all this," continued Haroun, "was it not you who wrote those blasphemous lines—

"'Mohammed, thou to whom we look when trouble's storms arise,
Come on, sir, for we twain could beat the Monarch of the Skies.'"

"Well," asked Abu Nawwâs, meekly, "and did we?" "I don't know what you did," answered the Caliph. "Then surely your Majesty will not kill me for what you don't know." "Cease this nonsense," said Haroun Alraschid, getting impatient. "You have over and over again in your poetry confessed to things for which you deserve death." "God knew all about those things," said Abu Nawwâs, "long before your Majesty did, and He said in the Koran, 'Those poets are followed by their familiar demons. Seest thou not how they wander in every valley, and how they say things which they never do!'" "Let the fellow go," said Haroun; "there's no catching him any way."

How useful it was to cultivate repartee and ready wit the following incident will testify. An officer named Hamîd et Tûsi one day incurred the anger of the Caliph, who immediately ordered the sword and beheading tray to be brought. Hamîd began to weep, and Alraschid asked him "what he was weeping" for. "I am not afraid of death," said he, "for that is the common lot; but I am distressed at being obliged to leave the world while the Commander of the Faithful is angry with me." Haroun laughed, and spared his life.

El Asmaí tells us that Haroun Alraschid once praised a song of Ishák's, and ordered a sum of money to be given him at the same time. The singer said, "O Commander of the Faithful! your words of praise are more eloquent than my song; why, then, shall I take the reward?" For this compliment the Caliph made him an additional present; and El Asmaí writes—"Then I knew that Ishák was more clever at money-hunting than even I myself was!"

An anecdote, characteristic of the time, and affording a hint as to the manner in which Haroun Alraschid amassed his enormous wealth, is the following. Sufyán ibn Oyainah, the chief jurisconsult of the city, and a well known authority for the "Traditions," once came into the Caliph's presence in company with a certain ascetic, named El Fadhail. When they entered the apartment, the latter asked which was the Caliph, and on his being pointed out to him, addressed him thus—"O thou with the handsome face! art thou he whose hand governs this people, and who has taken such a responsibility on his shoulders? Truly thou hast taken on thyself a heavy burden." On hearing this, Alraschid shed tears, and ordered a purse of money to be given to each. El Fadhail refused to accept the gift, although the monarch urged that if he did not require it for himself he might expend it in

charity. When reproached by the Cadi for his refusal, he seized his companion by the beard, and said—"How can you, the chief jurisconsult of the city, make so great a blunder? Had these people (the Caliph and his officers) gained the money lawfully, it would have been lawful for me to accept it." The "Traditions" alluded to are the Hadîth, or sayings attributed to Mohammed, which form, as the Talmud does to the Pentateuch, a sort of appendix to the Koran, and supply a code of laws by which almost every act of life is regulated. But a *hadîth* has no authority unless it can be traced directly to Mohammed through various trustworthy persons, and to give it the proper sanction the name of each of the narrators must be mentioned. Thus, if a scrupulous Moslem asks a traditionist whether it be lawful to kill a wasp while he is on a pilgrimage, at which time he is forbidden to kill any living thing except the animal to be sacrificed at Mecca, the answer will be something like this—"I have heard from the Rev. Dr. Z. that the Rev. Dr. Y. told him that he heard from X., who had it from W.," and so on through the alphabet till we come to Ali, Mohammed's cousin, "that he heard the Prophet say that if the beast stung him he would smash it with his *miswâk*, or toothstick, which the Prophet was very fond of using, and that, therefore, it must be lawful to kill the wasp." One story current about these folk is that a traditionist and a

Christian were in a sailing boat together, and the Christian, not feeling well, produced a bottle of wine, and, pouring out a glass, handed it to his Mohammedan companion before drinking himself. The traditionist drank it up without reflecting, and asked, smacking his lips, what it was. "A glass of wine," innocently replied the Christian; whereupon the Moslem made a face—Moslems never drink wine, as everybody knows, since it is forbidden by their law—and asked him if he was sure it was really wine. "Quite," said the other. "I had it from a Jew wine merchant; my servant bought it for me." "What a credulous fool you are," replied the Doctor; "we traditionists have great discussions about the authority of even such persons as Sufyán ibn Oyainah and Yezid ibn Harún, and am I going to believe a Christian on the authority of a slave who had it from a Jew? Give me another glass!"

I may add that this system of tracing a legend to its original narrator is extended to secular history by the Arab writers; thus the story of the quarrel between the Caliph's half-brother and the singer Ishák, related further on, is told by the author of the *Kitáb el Aghání* (a well-known work on poets and singers), who had it direct from one Mohammed, who heard it from his father Ahmed, who had it from his father Ishmael, who had it from his brother, the very Ishák who is the hero of the story. Nearly

every one of the anecdotes which are embodied in this chapter are thus vouched for, and may therefore be taken as at any rate contemporary current stories; while the distinctive characteristics of the various personages concerned are so easily recognised in the different stories from different sources, that their truth and genuineness are apparent.

These gentry knew well how to turn their knowledge to account by making their decisions suit the wishes of their royal or noble patrons. The chief Cadi, Abu Yúsuf, owed his introduction to Haroun Alraschid and his subsequent eminence to this complaisancy. He had, by an ingenious application of the law, relieved an officer of the Court from the consequences of a perjury he had unwittingly committed, and the latter, finding the Caliph himself one day in a state of mental perturbation, recommended the learned Sheikh as an infallible physician in cases of conscience, and Abu Yúsuf was accordingly sent for. While passing between the two rows of buildings which formed the Imperial apartments, he noticed a youth of distinguished appearance at one of the windows, who, on catching his eye, made signals of distress to him, and appeared to implore his help. On being ushered into the Caliph's presence, the latter abruptly asked him whether an Imám—that is, a spiritual leader—was bound to punish anyone whom he had himself detected *in flagrante delicto* with the

flogging prescribed by law as a punishment for certain crimes. Abu Yúsuf, shrewdly conjecturing that the young man whom he had seen might be connected with the Caliph's family and with the question submitted to him, promptly answered "No;" whereupon Haroun threw himself on the ground and returned thanks to Allah. "But on what authority," demanded he, "is your decision based?" "Because we are told to reject the application of penalties in cases of doubt," was the reply. "How can one doubt what one has seen with one's own eyes?" asked Alraschid. "Seeing," said Abu Yúsuf, "is not better than knowing; and even knowing of a crime is not of itself sufficient to authorise punishment without the testimony of witnesses, which the law demands; besides, no one is allowed to do justice to himself." The Caliph's conscience was quieted, and a handsome sum of money from both the monarch and his son—the young man who had caught the Cadi's eye—rewarded Abu Yúsuf for his courtier-like interpretation of the traditions.

On another occasion, Haroun was, to his great joy, assured on clerical authority that he was certain of entering Paradise, because he had once in his youth resisted a strong temptation to do wrong; for does not the Koran say, "But as for him who feared the station of his Lord, and prohibited his soul from lust, verily Paradise is his resort!"

Abu Yúsuf kept up his reputation, and his legal knowledge stood the Caliph often in good stead. One day Haroun sent for him to decide between himself and his kinsman, Isa 'bn Jaafer. The latter had a slave girl whom the Caliph admired, and begged for as a present. Isa refused, and the Caliph swore that unless he gave up the girl he would put him to death. The poor gentleman explained that he had already registered a solemn oath, that if he either gave the girl away, or sold her, he would divorce his wife, emancipate his slaves, and give all he possessed to the poor. This was the dilemma which Abu Yúsuf was called in to deal with, and he advised Isa to give his Sovereign half the girl and sell him the other half, so that the letter, at least, of his oath might be preserved!

A somewhat similar story is told of Jaafer the Barmecide and the Caliph, the same Abu Yúsuf intervening. One night the two were drinking together, when Haroun said—"I hear that you have bought a certain slave girl whom I have for a long time been desirous of obtaining; sell her to me." "I cannot sell her," said Jaafer. "Then give her to me." "Nor will I give her away," said the other. "May Zobeideh be irrevocably divorced from me if you shall not either give or sell her to me," cried Alraschid in a rage. The words were scarcely spoken, before their full import dawned on the minds of the

Caliph and Jaafer, and at once sobered them. "This is a matter," said Haroun, "which none but Abu Yúsuf can decide," and at once sent for him. The Cadi, rightly conjecturing that nothing but a very important matter would have induced the Caliph to send for him in the middle of the night, got up hastily, mounted his mule, and told his servant to bring the nosebag and a few oats with him, as he might be detained. When he appeared, the Caliph rose to greet him, and having made him sit down on the sofa with him, and explained the difficulty he and Jaafer were in, the Cadi proposed the same way out of it as that given in the last account; but Haroun was not yet satisfied. He wished to have possession of the girl at once, without waiting for the completion of the ceremonies necessary for the expiation of their oaths. "Nothing is simpler," replied Abu Yúsuf. "Let me marry her to one of your slaves, and make him divorce her the moment afterwards, then she will be lawful for you."[1] So a slave was brought in, the girl was then and there married to him, and he was bidden to divorce her. This, however, he stoutly refused to do, although tempted with a large bribe,

[1] In certain cases—where a man and woman are forbidden to marry—as, for instance, a husband who has divorced his wife three times, and wishes to re-marry her—the prohibition can only be removed by the woman marrying some one else, and then procuring a divorce from him. The husband's word is sufficient for a divorce.

thus making matters worse than before, and driving the Caliph almost frantic with rage. But the courtier Cadi had a legal remedy for the new difficulty, and he caused the husband to be made over as a slave to his own wife, after which he pronounced a formal decision annulling the marriage, on the ground that the slave had become her property. The Caliph and Jaafer were both so delighted with this result, that they sent him home with the nosebag of his mule filled with gold. I cannot resist quoting the comment of the historian upon this incident. "Observe, oh learned reader, this occurrence, for it contains several beautiful points: firstly, the complaisance of Jaafer towards Alraschid, and secondly, Alraschid's clemency and generosity, and thirdly, the great knowledge of the Cadi; so may Allah have mercy on all their souls! But as to the question of the expiation of the oaths, it is hardly sanctioned by our own sect, and Abu Yúsuf only treated it in accordance with the laws of his own sect. But Allah knows best which is right!"

The following story will give some idea of the way in which the governors of provinces were appointed by Alraschid. Isma'íl ibn Sálih, brother of the Abd el Melik who, as I have already said, had fallen under the Caliph's displeasure, was one day sent for by the latter, who desired to see him. Isma'íl had promised his brother not to go anywhere during his imprisonment, but was induced by El Fadhl to go, on

the pretence that Haroun was unwell. Before setting out, however, Abd el Melik said to his brother, "They only want you to drink with them and sing to them, and if you do so, you are no brother of mine." Haroun received him very graciously, and invited him to dine with him, after which the court physician recommended his royal master to drink some wine. "By Allah!" said the Caliph, "I will not drink unless Isma'íl drinks with me." "But, my lord," said Isma'íl, "I have sworn not to do anything of the sort." The Caliph would take no refusal, and they drank three glasses apiece. A curtain was then drawn aside, and some singing and dancing girls entered and performed, until Isma'íl began to grow merry in spite of himself. Now Alraschid had in his hand a rosary of precious stones, worth an incalculable sum of money, and taking a lute from the hand of one of the damsels, he threw the rosary over it, and placing both in Isma'íl's lap, said—"Come, sing us something, and expiate your oath out of the value of this rosary." Thereupon Isma'íl burst out into the following verse—

"My hand to sin I never taught,
My feet to faults have never led,
Nor eye nor ear have ever brought
A sinful thought into my head;
And if I now my fate deplore,
'Tis but the fate of folks before!"

The Caliph, delighted, called for a lance, and, affixing the banner of Egypt to it, handed it then and there to Isma'íl—he, by this act, appointing him governor of the province. "I ruled it," says Isma'íl, "for two years, and I loaded it with justice, and came away *with five hundred thousand dinars* (£250,000) *in my pocket!*"

Ibrahím el Mosili relates that he went out one day to take the air, and get rid of the effects of a too heavy drinking bout, when he perceived a smell of cooking that aroused his appetite. Having ordered his servant to find out from which house the odour proceeded, he presented himself at the door, and requested the girl who opened it to allow him to partake of the meal that was being prepared. The girl went to her mistress, and at once returned with permission for them to enter. She then tasted the contents of a pot that was upon the fire, and set a dish of it before the visitors. Ibrahím found it very savoury, ate heartily, and was about to take his departure, when the lady of the house sent word out to say that she regretted the absence of her husband, who would, she was sure, have been pleased to entertain them further, and to drink with them. As he was leaving, he passed a man riding upon an ass, who turned out to be the master himself. He, having learnt from the girl what had happened, rode after Ibrahím and insisted on bringing him back to the

house, where, taking him into the best apartment, he set before his guest an elegant dessert and some excellent wine, and the two kept up the carousal until the evening. The next day Ibrahím was told that the Caliph had over and over again sent for him during his absence, so he hurried to the palace, and by way of making his excuses told his adventures, and waxed eloquent upon the savoury nature of the stew he had tasted. The Caliph was amused, and said, "Did he not ask you who you were?" "No," replied Isma'íl, "we had plenty else to do." Haroun wished to taste the dish for himself, and ordered Isma'íl to procure an invitation for them both without acquainting their host with their names and rank. This was easily arranged for the next night, Isma'íl telling the hospitable stranger that his friend was deeply in debt, and dared not show himself by day for fear of his creditors! So the Caliph and his companion mounted two asses and rode to the house, where they were cordially received and entertained. The Caliph declared he had never tasted anything like the stew, was charmed with all he saw and heard, and asked his host about his circumstances. "My father," said he, "left me a large property, and I dissipated the greater part of it; but I retrenched in time, and, thank Allah, now I want for nothing." Presently the fumes of the wine and the songs of the singing girls who were present so expanded the Caliph's heart that

he told Ibrahím to take their host aside and tell him who he was. So Ibrahím said, "Do you know who your guest is?" "No," said he. "Why, he is the Commander of the Faithful himself." The man, on hearing this, laughed till he rolled over on his back, and kept calling out, "O, what a wonderfully good thing! O, you wag!" At this the Caliph laughed immoderately too, and the man called out to his wife, "What think you of our guests? They have got drunk, and repay my hospitality by making fun of me, and one of them declares he is the Prince of the Faithful;" then, offering a glass with mock humility to Alraschid, he said, "Drink, Commander of the Faithful," and Haroun laughed the more. "But," said Ibrahím, "it is really the Commander of the Faithful!" "Pray stop your drunken jokes," said the other; "you have only drunk a couple of glasses, and have turned this fellow into the Commander of the Faithful; in another half-an-hour you will make him out to be the Prophet himself!" When daylight began to appear, the party broke up. Ibrahím, failing to convince his host of the truth of his communication, told him to ask his neighbours in the morning after El Malik (the King), and after Ibrahím el Mosili, and when asked his name, to reply that he was "the man with the stew." In the morning his neighbours said to him, "What a noisy party you had last night; who were your two guests?" When he

had told them all, one of the neighbours said, "Tell me what they were like," and on hearing the description, declared his conviction that it was really the Caliph. So the man went off to the house of Ibrahím el Mosili, and sent word in that "the man with the stew" had called. Ibrahím at once admitted him, rode with him to the palace, and presented him to Alraschid, who insisted on his repeating his sarcastic observations of the previous night, which he did, to Haroun's great delight. The Caliph ordered an immense sum of money to be given to him, and bade him tell him the receipt for the celebrated stew. "No, Commander of the Faithful," said he; "if I were to give away a thing that has proved so valuable to me, I should have no advantage left in it. I shall be happy to cook it for the Commander of the Faithful whenever he pleases." Haroun was content with the reply, and the lucky host was ever afterwards known as "the man with the stew."

Haroun Alraschid did not always meet with a courteous reception. Once he was performing the ceremonies of the Hajj or pilgrimage at Mecca, and was preparing to make the Tawáf, or circuit of the Ka'abeh, the holy shrine there, as prescribed by law, when, to his amazement, an Arab of the desert ran before him, and commenced to make the circuit first. At a hint from their master, the chamberlains stopped the audacious Bedawi, who, however,

promptly answered, "God made Imám (Head of the Faith) and subject equal in this place when He said, 'The Sacred Mosque, which we have made for all men alike, the dweller therein and the stranger, and he who desires profanation therein with injustice, we will make him taste grievous woe'" (*Koran* xxii. 25). When Alraschid heard this, he ordered the chamberlains to let him go on unmolested. The same thing took place when the Caliph wished to kiss the celebrated black stone, and to perform his prayers at the station of Abraham—*i.e.*, the stone on which the patriarch stood when rebuilding the Ka'abeh. After the ceremonies were complete, Haroun sent an officer to summon the Arab before him. "I do not want him," said the fellow; "if he wants me, let him come to me." So the Caliph went to him, and, saluting him, said, "I will sit down here, with your permission." "The house is not mine," was the reply; "and the sanctuary is not my sanctuary. We are all equal here. If you like, sit down; and if not, be off!" Then Haroun sat down, and said, "O Arab! I should like to ask you about your religious duties: for if you are right in that, you will be right in other matters; but if you fail in that, you will fail in other things." The Arab said, "Do you ask the question to learn yourself or to confound me!" Alraschid wondered at his ready answer, and said, "Nay, it is to learn." "Then," said the Arab, "sit in

the position fitting for a pupil who asks his teacher." Haroun complied, and sat down upon his heels, with his knees on the ground. "Now," said the other, "ask what you like." "I wish you to tell me," said the Caliph, "what duty God has imposed upon you." "Do you wish me to tell you of one duty that He has imposed, or of five, or of seventeen, or of thirty-four, or of eighty-five, or one for the whole length of my life?" Haroun laughed mockingly, and said, "I ask you about your duties, and you give me an account." Said the other, "O Haroun! if religion did not involve an account, God would not call men to account on the Day of Judgment, 'when no soul shall be wronged so much as the weight of a grain of mustard seed, for We are accountants enough!'" (*Koran* xxi. 48). The Caliph flushed up with fury when he heard himself addressed as simple Haroun, and not as Commander of the Faithful; he, however, restrained himself, out of respect for the sanctity of the place in which they were. "Explain yourself," said he, "or I will have your head cut off." "I beseech your Majesty," interposed the chamberlain, "pardon him, and make a gift of his life to this holy place." But the Arab only laughed a scornful laugh, and said, "I know not which of you two is the greater fool, he who would remit a doom which is due, or he who would hasten a doom that is not due as yet! As for your

question," he continued, "concerning my duties, God has imposed upon me many of them. When I spoke to you of one duty, I meant the religion of Islam; when I spoke of five, I meant the five daily prayers; when I spoke of seventeen, I meant the seventeen prostrations; when I spoke of the thirty-four, I meant the thirty-four adorations; when I spoke of the eighty-five, I meant the eighty-five utterances of the formula, 'God is great!' when I spoke of one that lasts my whole life long, I meant the duty of the pilgrimage to Mecca."

The Arab then retorted by asking a difficult question of the Caliph, which he could not answer, and which turned out to be a kind of legal enigma relating to the laws of divorce. Alraschid, delighted at his ingenuity and piety, ordered ten thousand dirhems to be given to him; which, however, he refused to accept. Then said Haroun, "Shall I provide for you?" "He who provides for you will provide for me," was the answer. "Are you in debt?" asked Alraschid. "No, thank God!" replied the Arab, who seemed resolved on thwarting the Caliph.

At the conclusion of the interview, Alraschid discovered that the outspoken Sheikh was no other than a direct lineal descendant of Ali ibn Abi Talib, who, as the representative of the ousted dynasty of the Alides, was no doubt glad enough to avail himself of the privileges of the sacred month and sacred

place to display his learning and independence, and humble the pride of the hated descendant of Abbas.

The Ibrahím el Mosili, mentioned in some of the foregoing stories, was one of the most celebrated musicians of the time, and a great favourite at the court. His music was sometimes inspired in an odd way, if we are to believe his own account of it. Once he asked Alraschid for permission to spend the day at home with his family, and having received permission, and reached his house, he gave strict orders that no one was to be admitted on any pretext whatever. What was his surprise, on taking his place amongst the members of his harem, to find himself in the presence of a sheikh of imposing appearance, and of such persuasive powers of speech, that Ibrahím, in spite of himself, was constrained to welcome him, instead of resenting his intrusion. The two passed the day together in eating, drinking, and music, the unknown singing three airs which absolutely charmed his host, after which he disappeared in as mysterious a manner as he had entered. Ibrahím rushed out with a drawn sword, and threatened the porters with death if they did not tell how the Arab had entered, and where he was gone. They declared that no one had passed through the doors, when suddenly, in the midst of the disturbance, the voice of the uncanny visitant was heard telling Ibrahím not to trouble himself, for it was Abu Murrah—the Evil One

himself—who had kept him company on his holiday. Ibrahím remembered the airs, and sang them to the Caliph, who was much delighted, both with the music and the incident. Probably the ladies of the harem could have given a different account of the handsome and accomplished sheikh, had they been so disposed.

One day the Caliph, while in Jaafer's company, came across a company of Arab maidens, one of whom, the daughter of a chief, so charmed him with her wit, eloquence, and power of improvising poetry, that he proposed for her to her father, and married her. After some time her father died, and Haroun, who was excessively attached to her, went himself to break the sad news. No sooner did she see him, with evident signs of trouble upon his face, than she rushed into her private apartment, and changed her gorgeous attire for a mourning garment, and cried out—"My father is dead!" The Caliph came in to console her, and as soon as the first paroxysm of her grief was over, asked her how she had learnt of her father's death. "From your face, Commander of the Faithful," said she. "Since I have been with you, I have never seen you like that before; and I had no one to fear for but my father, so long as I knew you were alive." A short time after, she followed her father to the grave.

Maan ibn Záïdah, who was one of the Caliph's officers, had continued to incur his Sovereign's

displeasure, although he was still permitted to continue in attendance on him. Seeing that he walked slowly, and with difficulty, Haroun said, "You have grown old, Maan." "Yes, sire," was the reply, "in your service." "But you have still some energy left," said Haroun. "It is at your service, sire," answered the old man. "You are a bold fellow," said the Caliph. "Yes, in withstanding your enemies, sire." These answers brought him again into favour, and procured for him the governorship of the province of Basra.

One night Haroun was very sleepless, so he sent for Jaafer the Barmecide, and said, "I desire you to dispel the sadness and weariness which I feel. Allah has created many folks capable of cheering the sad—maybe you are one of them." Said Jaafer—"Let us come out upon the roof of the palace, and watch the myriads of stars, how complicated and how lofty they are; the moon rising like the face of one we love, O Commander of the Faithful!" "No," said the Caliph, "I have no mind for that." "Then," said Jaafer, "open the palace window that looks over the garden, and see the beautiful trees, and listen to the songs of the birds, and the murmuring of the waters, and smell the sweet odours of the flowers, and hearken to the water-wheel humming, with a moan like that of a lover who has lost his love; or sleep, O Commander of the Faithful, until the dawn arise." "Nay," said

the Caliph, "I have no mind for that." "Then," said Jaafer, "open the window which looks over the Tigris, and look at the ships, and at the sailors singing, sailing, working, and amusing themselves." "Nay," said Alraschid, "I have no mind for that." "Then," said Jaafer, "O Commander of the Faithful! rise, and let us go down to the stables, and look at your Arab horses—beautiful creatures of all colours. There are chargers black as the night, when it is at its darkest. There are steeds—grey, and chestnut, and dun, and bay, and white, and cream-coloured, and pied, and other colours, that would daze one's wits!" "Nay," said Alraschid, "I have no mind for that." "Then," said Jaafer, "O Commander of the Faithful! you have three hundred girls who sing and dance and play; send for them all, it may be the sadness which is on your heart will cease." "Nay," said Alraschid, "I have no mind for that." "Then," said Jaafer, "cut off your servant Jaafer's head, for he can't soothe his Sovereign's grief!"

One of Haroun's favourite companions was Abu Miriam, of Medina, an incorrigible wag, and almost as impudent as Abu Nawwâs himself. One morning early, the Caliph came into the room where Abu Miriam was asleep, and, pulling the blanket from his face, said, "How are you this morning?" "It isn't morning yet," was the reply; "go about your business." "Arise," said Haroun, solemnly, "and say the

prayers of dawn." "This is the time prescribed by Abu Jerúd," said the other; "I belong to Abu Yúsuf's sect." So the Caliph proceeded to say his prayers by himself, until, when he came to a passage from the Koran (xxxvi. 21), "What ails me that I should not worship Him who created me?" Abu Miriam observed, "I am sure I don't know!" The Caliph, much incensed, reproached him for interrupting his prayers. "I did not mean to interrupt you," said he; "but I was shocked to hear you making such a remark;" on which Haroun could not help laughing again, but warned him to avoid making fun of religious subjects in future.

One day Haroun Alraschid ordered an equerry of his, named El Hakam, to accompany him the following morning on a hunting expedition. El Hakam went home to his wife and said, "The Caliph has ordered me to go hunting with him, but I am sure I shall never be able to endure it, for I am, as you know, accustomed to breakfast early, while the Caliph never takes a meal until nearly midday; I shall die of hunger! By Allah, I won't go!" "Nay," said his wife, "Allah forbid! it is impossible for you to disobey orders." "But what am I to do?" said he. Said his wife, "You can take a packet of *heláweh*[1] with you, and put it in your turban, to eat in the meantime, and when breakfast-time comes, you can

[1] A sweetmeat made of honey and sesame meal.

make a good meal with the Caliph." The next morning El Hakam bought himself a paper packet of *heláweh*, and placed it in the folds of his turban, and, mounting his ass, joined Alraschid's cavalcade.

Now it so happened that the Caliph noticed the paper packet showing through the muslin folds of his equerry's turban, and calling Jaafer aside, he said, "Do you see that paper of *heláweh* in El Hakam's turban? I will tease him and prevent him from eating it." As they were going along the road, the Caliph made as though he saw some game, and rode ahead, whereupon El Hakam seized the opportunity to take the sweetmeat from his turban and to put a piece in his mouth. No sooner had he done so than the Caliph wheeled sharply round, and cried, "El Hakam!" "Here, your Majesty!" said he, hastily snatching the piece of *heláweh* out of his mouth and throwing it away. "This mule," said Alraschid, "does not please me to-day; I think there is something the matter with it." "Perhaps the groom has over-fed it," suggested El Hakam. After a short time the Caliph again rode on, and El Hakam, who was now famishing, again furtively crammed a morsel into his mouth, when the voice of the Commander of the Faithful suddenly shouting his name compelled him to throw it away and answer. "I cannot think what has happened to this mule to-day," said Haroun; "she does not go at all to my liking." "To-morrow,"

said El Hakam, "I will have her seen to by the veterinary doctor." Then they went on a little, El Hakam grumbling to himself, and calling down all sorts of imprecations upon the mule and her master too. He had scarcely found an opportunity of slipping another piece of the *heláweh* into his mouth, when the Caliph turned round and called him again. "Ah!" muttered the unfortunate equerry, disposing of his morsel, "what a black day is this for me!—always Hakam, Hakam, Hakam!—what madness has got hold of you?" "See here," said Haroun, "I think this mule has been purposely lamed; don't you see how she halts?" "To-morrow, your Majesty," was the reply, "the farrier shall change her shoes, and then she will get all right, if it please Allah!"

As they were travelling along the road, they met a caravan of merchants coming from Persia, one of whom, stepping forward, prostrated himself, and kissed the ground before the Caliph, offering him at the same time some costly presents. Among the latter was a young Persian slave girl of exquisite beauty, "with undulating form, full bosom, slender waist, eyes like those of a gazelle, and a mouth like Solomon's ring." Alraschid, ever susceptible to female charms, gave the merchant a princely gift of money, and, turning to El Hakam, bade him ride back at once to the city with the damsel, and prepare the palace for his reception, and order a suitable banquet

to be got ready. El Hakam did as he was bidden, and the Caliph himself returned shortly afterwards, when, dismissing his attendants, he entered the banqueting apartment with the fair Persian, having first commanded El Hakam to stand sentry at the door, and give him immediate notice in case the Princess Zobeideh should appear upon the scene. El Hakam replied, "I hear and obey Allah and the Commander of the Faithful," and took his stand outside the door.

Scarcely was the repast over and the wine-cups filled, when a gentle tap was heard at the door, and Haroun, feeling sure that the Princess had arrived, hastily removed the bottle and glasses, and concealed the damsel in a cupboard. Opening the door, he found El Hakam standing there, and asked him, "Has the Princess Zobeideh come?" "No, O Commander of the Faithful!" said El Hakam; "but I knew how anxious you were about that mule, so I asked the groom, and I found that he had in fact over-fed her; but to-morrow I will have her bled, and I have no doubt but that she will soon get better." "Never mind the mule," exclaimed the Caliph, angrily; "hold your tongue, and watch by the door; and if you see the Lady Zobeideh coming, let me know at once."

They had just comfortably settled down again when another knock was heard, and, hastily concealing his fair visitor and the wine, Haroun opened the door, and enquired of El Hakam if the Princess

was really coming. "No, O Commander of the Faithful!" said El Hakam; "but knowing your anxiety about the mule, I enquired of the veterinary doctor, and he tells me that nothing ails her, but that she is a little restive from want of exercise." "May Allah never bless you or the mule either," shouted Alraschid. "Did I not tell you not to plague me with such nonsense? Keep at your post, and take care that the Lady Zobeideh does not surprise us; for if she does, I will make this one of the most unlucky days of your life!" "Upon my head and eyes!" replied the equerry. Presently the Caliph heard a stamping upon the roof of the apartment where El Hakam had gone to watch, and, taking his precautions as before, went out, fully expecting this time to meet the Princess herself. He found, however, only El Hakam, who said, "I noticed that mule, sire, stamping just as I am stamping now, and I feared it might be suffering from a colic from the over-feeding, and I feel very anxious about it——" "Begone out of my sight!" said the Caliph, with a torrent of imprecations; "and never let me see your face again. If I do, I will have you hanged!" El Hakam went away crestfallen at the result of his somewhat dangerous jest. His wife, however, consoled him, and waited upon the Lady Zobeideh herself to beg for her intercession. The Caliph, not knowing how much the Princess might get to know if the matter

went further, thought it best to accede to her request, and pardoned El Hakam.

While staying at Híra, Aun el Ibádí, governor of that place, brought the Caliph a dish containing a very fine fat fish, served up with a dainty sauce, and set it before him. The latter was about to taste it, when the court physician, Gabriel ibn Bakhtishou, forbade his master to touch it, and made signs to the host to put it aside for himself. The movement did not escape Haroun's notice; and when the physician had left, he sent an attendant after him, with orders to surprise him in his apartments, and to report on what he was doing. Gabriel had no doubt anticipated this manœuvre, for the spy found him in Aun's private apartments, sitting down to his own dinner with the identical fish before him. Calling for three bowls, he placed a piece of the fish in each; he then poured into one of them a glass of wine, and said, "This is Gabriel's food;" into the next he poured iced water, and said, "This is the food of the Commander of the Faithful; may Allah glorify him!" with the third portion of the fish he placed several pieces of meat of different kinds, a sweetmeat, some piquant sauces, vegetables, and various other viands—about one or two mouthfuls of each—and poured iced water over the whole, saying, "This is the food of the Commander of the Faithful, if he takes anything besides the fish." Then he gave the three

bowls to his host, and bade him keep them until he should ask for him, after which he sat down and made a hearty meal of the rest of the fish, washing it down with copious draughts of wine. When the Caliph awoke from his *siesta*, he summoned the spy, and asked if Gabriel had or had not eaten of the fish? On learning the facts, he ordered the attendants to bring him the three bowls. In the first, which Gabriel had called his own, and over which he had poured pure wine, the fish was found to be well digested, and the whole reduced to a liquid state. In the second, the Caliph's bowl, over which the iced water had been poured, the fish was found to be swelled out to twice its size; while the third bowl, containing the mixed viands, had already become corrupted. Gabriel's little plan succeeded, for the Caliph sent him a magnificent present, and treated him ever after with increased confidence and affection.

Alraschid was too much addicted to the pleasures of the table, and Gabriel tells us that once, after gormandising more than usual, he was seized with a fit of so serious a nature that all who were present thought that he had breathed his last, and the two young princes, Emín and Mamún, were sent for. The physician, detecting some slight signs of animation, ordered him to be bled; but Kauther, the personal attendant of Emín, the then heir-apparent, and who hoped to retain his influence with the new

Caliph, strongly opposed the measure, and declared he would not consent to trying to bleed a dead man. Emín, however, interfered, and the Caliph was brought round again.

Ibrahim ibn el Mehdi, a brother of the Caliph's, relates the following anecdote :—" Haroun Alraschid once visited me while he was staying at Rakka. It was his custom at meals to eat the hot dishes before the cold, and on one occasion when the latter were set upon the table, he noticed a bowl of viands apparently prepared from fish. The Caliph thought the pieces too small, and said, 'Why has your cook cut it up into such small fragments?' 'Commander of the Faithful,' I replied, 'the dish is composed of fishes' tongues.' 'There seem to be at least a hundred tongues in it,' said Haroun ; but my servant, Murákib, declared that there were more than a hundred and fifty. Then the Caliph demanded how much it had cost, and on being told that a thousand dirhems (nearly £40) had been spent upon it, he jumped up from the table, and swore that he would not touch another morsel until Murákib brought him a thousand dirhems. When the money came, he ordered it to be given away in charity. 'There,' said he, 'I hope that will prove some compensation for your extravagance in expending so much upon one dish.' Then he took the dish in his hand, and turning to one of his own attendants, he said, 'Take this

outside my brother's house, and give it to the first poor person you meet.' Now," continued Ibrahim, "that bowl which I had bought in honour of the Caliph's visit cost me two hundred and sixty dirhems, and I gave a wink to one of my servants to go outside with the Caliph's officer, and purchase the bowl back from whoever might get it. Alraschid noticed and understood the movement, and called out, 'Page! when you give the bowl to the beggar, tell him that the Commander of the Faithful advises him not to sell it for less than two hundred dirhems!' which," says Ibrahim, "is the sum that it actually cost me."

The same prince, Ibrahim, tells another story of his brother Haroun:—"I was one day with the Caliph in a boat on the way to Mosul. We had just finished a game of chess when Alraschid said to me, 'Ibrahim, which do you think is the best name in the world?' 'That of the Prophet, on whom be blessing and peace!' said I. 'And which next?' asked the Caliph. 'That of the Commander of the Faithful,' was my reply. 'And which name do you consider the most unlucky?' enquired his Majesty. 'That of Ibrahim,' said I. 'Shame on you!' he said; 'why, it is the name of the Friend of Allah!'[1] 'Just so,' I answered;

[1] The Patriarch Abraham—in Arabic, Ibrahim—is so called. According to the story in the Koran, he was persecuted by Nimrod, who threw him into a fiery furnace for opposing the idolatry of his people. The fire, however, was miraculously kept from hurting him.

'and it was from the ill-luck attending his name that Nimrod so persecuted him.' 'But Ibrahim was the name of the infant son of the Prophet,' objected Haroun. 'Yes,' I said; 'and had he had any other name he might have lived.' 'How about the Imám, Ibrahim?' 'Thanks to his name,' I answered, 'Merwán el Jaadí killed him by fastening him up in a sack of quicklime. And I might add, Commander of the Faithful, the names of Ibrahim, the son of Walíd, who was dethroned, and Ibrahim ibn Abdallah ibn el Hasan, the Alide, who was killed. In short, I have never known anybody of the name but he was either condemned to death, the bastinado, or exile.' I had scarcely done speaking when one of the boatmen shouted out to a comrade, 'Here, Ibrahim!' and added a most opprobrious epithet. 'Did I not tell your Majesty,' I continued, 'that Ibrahim was the most unlucky of names?' at which the Caliph burst out into a hearty laugh."

All of Haroun's family did not participate in his luxury and fondness for amusement. One of his own sons was afflicted with melancholy, and at the age of sixteen adopted the habit and life of a recluse. Haroun reproved him for "disgracing him amongst kings;" and the youth replied that "his father was disgracing *him* among the saints," and with this retort withdrew himself from the palace, and worked as a daily labourer amongst the bricklayers. The

wages he always demanded were a dirhem and a sixth daily, with the latter of which he supported himself, and the former he gave away in alms. He died in great penury, having confided to his employer a valuable ruby ring, which he entreated him to give to the Caliph, and through which his fate and identity were discovered.

While at Kufa, on his return from the pilgrimage to Mecca, during which he made the celebrated arrangement concerning the accession of his two sons, Haroun Alraschid heard with some concern that there was still living at Damascus a member of the family of Ommaiyeh, who possessed so much wealth and such influence in the city, that the Caliph was assured that he might at any moment attempt to restore the dynasty of his house. Sending for Menára, one of his most trusted courtiers, Haroun despatched him with a large company of horsemen and slaves, and secret instructions to arrest the dangerous noble, and bring him back fettered within thirteen days to the Caliph. He also carried a letter to the Governor of Damascus, ordering him to assist in the arrest, or, in case of the suspected individual refusing to obey the summons, to keep him and his household under the strictest surveillance. He was, moreover, ordered to take note of every look and word of his prisoner, and to make a full and minute report of the circumstances in which he found him.

So fast did Menára traverse the intervening desert, that he arrived at Damascus on the evening of the seventh day, after the gates of the city were closed. Not wishing to arouse suspicion by knocking at the gate and demanding entry for so large a company as he had with him, and so perhaps giving the intended prisoner warning and time to take his precautions, the envoy camped for the night outside the walls. In the morning, Menára went straight to the house of the Ommiade, and found the evidences of his wealth and power even beyond what had been reported. Entering, without waiting or asking for permission, he found a company of young men, and, announcing himself as the messenger of the Caliph, demanded which of them was the owner of the house. They replied that their father was at present in the bath, whereupon Menára peremptorily ordered him to be sent for. After some time, during which Menára begun to get disquieted, and to fear that his prey had escaped him, the person in question entered, and, without the least embarrassment, entered into conversation with the envoy, and asked him after the health of the Commander of the Faithful. He then invited Menára to sit down and breakfast with them, which he declined, but watched the man and his sons enjoying a splendid repast. "You had better join us, Menára," said the master of the house; and Menára, enraged at being thus familiarly addressed by his

name, for the first time observed that his servants and attendants had been intercepted by the retinue of the other, and that he himself was almost alone in the room with only five followers. The nonchalant manners of the man, and the certainty that, if it came to a question of arms, he could not arrest him without the assistance of the Governor of Damascus and his forces, by no means reassured the messenger. At length, after leisurely performing the noon-day prayer, the man condescended to ask Menára his business, when the latter at once gave him the Caliph's letter. The owner of the house read it, and immediately summoned all his sons and attendants round him; and when Menára saw them assemble in such a crowd, he made sure of immediate destruction. The Ommiade, however, began to address them, and engaged them by a most stringent oath, that if any two of them met together, they should not utter a word of blame against anyone else, but that they should retire to their apartments, and remain there until they heard from him. "This," said he, "is the letter of the Commander of the Faithful, bidding me to come to him, and after having seen it, I will not tarry a moment longer; bid my women folk behave themselves while I am away. I require no one to accompany me. Now," he continued, "call for your fetters." The envoy did so, and the man cheerfully put out his arms to be bound. Menára then ordered him to be

placed in a litter, and set out then and there, himself riding by his side, so as not to lose sight of him. As they were going along, they passed through a beautiful garden, and the prisoner, who had been chatting pleasantly with his captor, called his attention to it, said it belonged to himself, and waxed eloquent on the subject of the rare fruits and flowers which it contained. The same occurred on their passing through some fields and farms, the prisoner always amicably discussing their merits, until at last Menára's patience was exhausted, and he said, "Do you not know that the Commander of the Faithful is so anxious and annoyed on your account that he has sent for you from the bosom of your family, alone, and loaded with chains? You don't know how it may go with you, and yet you seem to trouble yourself less about it than other people do, and keep on describing to me your gardens and farms. Why, you do not know what you have been arrested for, or what the Caliph means to do with you, and yet you are quite quiet and indifferent. I had always supposed you were a Sheikh possessed of good sense." Then the prisoner cried out, "We belong to Allah, and unto Him shall we return! By Allah! my discernment has failed me in your case, for I thought that you must be a person of intelligence, or you would never have attained to the position you have with the Caliph, whereas what you are saying is more like the speech of the common herd!

As for what you tell me about the Commander of the Faithful and his anger, and his forcing me to appear at his door in this condition—I rely upon Allah, in whose hand is the forelock of the Commander of the Faithful. The Commander of the Faithful cannot control either profit or harm for me, save by the permission of Allah, whose name be exalted. I have committed no crime against the Caliph that I should fear to meet him. Besides, if he sees how loyal and true I am to him, he will esteem me; but if Allah in His prescience has determined that harm shall befall me from him, and my doom is really nigh, and I am to perish by his hand, all the angels and prophets and all the people in earth and heaven could not ward it off from me. Why should I trouble myself? It is useless to do so about what Allah has already decided; and to think the best of His decrees, and to resign ourselves perfectly to His will, is our bounden duty. I thought you knew all this; but now that I have found out the extent of your understanding, I will not speak another word to you until His Highness the Caliph separates us, as please Allah he soon will." "After that," says Menára, "I never heard a word from him, except as he read the Koran, or asked for water, or any other necessary, until we came near Kufa, which we did on the thirteenth day." About six parasangs from the town, a guard who had been watching for their return met them. and hastened

forward to take the news to the Caliph that the prisoner was in safe custody, and on his way. Towards evening they reached Kufa, and Menára was at once admitted to the presence of the Commander of the Faithful, who bade him narrate every detail of what he had seen and heard. When he told him of the Ommiade's reception of him, and of his breakfasting in so unconcerned a manner, the veins on Haroun's face swelled with anger; when he related how he had engaged his relations and servants not to harbour a single thought of revenge for the treatment he had received, and how he had voluntarily submitted to the fetters, the Caliph's features assumed a softer expression; but when Menára repeated the rebuke which the prisoner had addressed to him, Alraschid said, "By Allah! the accusations against him are false; he is a true and loyal man!" and ordered him to be relieved of his fetters, and brought before him. When the Ommiade entered the room, the Caliph ordered him to sit down, entered into familiar conversation with him, and asked him if he had any request to make. "None," was the politic reply, "except to return to my family; for, thanks to the justice of the Commander of the Faithful and his officers, neither I nor the people of the city where I live want for anything." Haroun sent him back to Damascus loaded with honours, and ordered Menára to escort him on

his way, and to attend upon him with the greatest deference.

Life and liberty were by no means secure at the Court of Bagdad, and the favourite of one day was often disgraced and thrown into a dungeon on the next.

The poet, Abu 'Atáhíyeh, probably before he became blind, was desperately enamoured of a girl named Otbah, a slave of Kheizarán, Haroun's mother. The girl complained to her mistress that the poet was disgracing her, by composing verses about her, and suggesting that she had given him encouragement. The princess told the Caliph Mehdi, and Abu 'Atáhíyeh received a severe beating for his pains. When Haroun Alraschid ascended the throne, the poet again began his attentions to Otbah, and composed a song in her honour, one verse of which—

"The Caliph's fawn has hunted me,
And how shall I again get free?"—

coming to Haroun's ears, he was exceedingly enraged; and considering it an unpardonable liberty to take with his name and dignity, ordered the poet to be thrown into prison. Abu 'Atáhíyeh, knowing how susceptible the monarch was to flattery, especially if couched in true poetic language, soon contrived to purchase his release with a few appropriate lines of eulogy, and so far ingratiated himself with Alraschid, that the latter promised him

that he would himself endeavour to further his suit, and if the damsel accepted it, to give the happy couple a magnificent wedding present. Other matters, however, occupied his attention, and he forgot all about his promise. Abu 'Atáhíyeh, not finding the opportunity of personally reminding him of it, composed three verses, and writing one of them upon each of three fans, induced Mesrúr to give them to the Caliph at a favourable moment. On one of them Haroun read—

"I court full oft the breezes fair,
If haply they the news might bear,
Of hopes at last fulfilled for me:
And in the fragrance of their sighs
A perfume sweet I recognise,
Breathed from thy liberality."

"The scamp writes well," said Haroun. On the second fan was written—

"My spirit, like a noble steed,
With outstretched neck and eager pace,
Doth ever to thy presence speed,
And for thy bounty onward race."

"Bravo!" said the Caliph; and taking up the third fan, he found written upon it—

"And oft, when I should else despair,
I bid myself more hopeful be,
For he is of a nature rare,
Who guaranteed success to me."

"Not so bad!" said the Caliph, and at once sent for the poet, and promised that he would without fail bring his suit to a favourable issue on the morrow. He next despatched a message to the slave girl, that she was to expect him the same evening, as he had a request to prefer to her, which he could only make in person. At the time mentioned, Haroun arrived at Otbah's apartments, attended by his favourite eunuchs, and said to her—"Before I tell you what I require, you must promise me to fulfil it." "I am your handmaid," she replied, "and will obey you in everything, except in the matter of Abu 'Atáhíyeh, for I promised your late father so, by every oath that can bind the good and bad; I swore that if I married Abu 'Atáhíyeh, I would walk barefoot to Mecca, and that as soon as one pilgrimage was over I would undertake another, and that no penitence should avail me instead; and that whatever I might possess I would give to the poor, except the carpet I pray upon!" She then threw herself at the Caliph's feet, and, bursting into a paroxysm of weeping, besought him to spare her; whereupon Alraschid promised not to trouble her any more upon the point. The next morning Abu 'Atáhíyeh appeared before him, radiant with the hope of success; but the Caliph said, "I have done my best for you, as Mesrúr, Raschíd, and the other servants can testify, but I could not prevail upon

your mistress to accept your suit." The poor poet, who appears to have been deeply attached to the lady, was so overcome by his disappointment, that he assumed the dervish garb, and took the vows of a monastic life. The following is an extract from a poem in which he laments the loss of his lady love—

> "I have cut the strong cords of my hope all apart,
> From the back of my camel the saddle I've ta'en,
> For the chill of despair has got hold on my heart,
> And I care not to camp or to travel again!"

Haroun Alraschid was very fond of listening to the songs of the boatmen during his progresses up and down the Tigris, but their inaccurate pronunciation and often improper language offended his pure Arab ears. He therefore one day bade his attendants bring him a poet to compose something that the men might sing without committing such frequent solecisms. It turned out that Abu 'Atáhíyeh was the only one capable of performing the task, and he was in prison. Haroun sent off to him, with orders to send the required poem immediately. Abu 'Atáhíyeh, who relates the story, says, "As he made no mention of setting me at liberty, I determined to write something which should make him weep rather than amuse him, and having composed the lines, I handed them to the officers who had brought the message." This composition is extant, and is a very fair, but by no

means extraordinary, copy of verses on the vanity of human wishes and the certainty of death: they seem, however, to have produced the desired effect upon the Caliph, who wept so copiously on hearing the boatmen sing them, that El Fadhl ibn Rabí was obliged to tell them to stop. But then Haroun, as the old historians tell us, "was the most easily moved to tears and the quickest to get in a passion of any man living."

Another instance of the Caliph's high-handed proceedings is the following:—

Salih ibn Mehran, one of the intimates of Haroun Alraschid, relates that one day, being summoned into the Caliph's presence, he found him in a very gloomy mood. After a few moments, Haroun raised his head, and said, "Go this moment and take from Mansúr ibn Ziyad ten million dirhems, and if he refuses to pay them, bring me his head! If you hesitate and fail to execute my command, I swear by the soul of my father Mehdi that I will decapitate you!" Salih asked what he was to do in case Mansúr paid part at once, and gave security for the payment of the rest on the following day. Haroun answered, "If this very day he fail to pay ten million dirhems in ready money, behead him! Let me hear no more idle talk." Salih felt assured from this that the Caliph was bent upon taking Mansúr's life, and came away in great distress, for the person threatened was a friend of his

own, and one of the most influential persons in Bagdad. However, he went straight to his house, and, taking him aside, told him what had happened. Mansúr threw himself at Salih's feet, and weeping, said, "The Commander of the Faithful must have resolved to take my life, for he knows well enough that I have never had so much money, and that I could not collect it in a lifetime; how, then, am I to do so in one day? For Allah's sake do me one favour, and let me go back into the house to bid farewell to my family, and let me entrust all the property I have into your hands for distribution among them when I am dead. No harm can come to you, because when I have said good-bye to my poor children, and handed the money over to you, you can cut off my head, and tell the Caliph that you have executed his orders." Salih acceded to his request so far as to bring him into the house, and when the sad news became known, the family set up a heart-rending lamentation. He then allowed him to make over his property, &c., in the manner he desired, and was about to carry him off to a convenient place of execution. Mansúr, in despair, but still clinging to life, said to him, "O Salih, in the old times, long before Haroun Alraschid was Caliph, I quarrelled with Yahya 'bn Khalid, the Barmecide, and since then I have always received insults and annoyance at his hands except on one occasion, when the 'Farthing-

grubber'[1] became displeased with me, and handed me over to him for punishment; then he treated me with the greatest kindness, and interceded with the Caliph for me. His house is on the way; pray take me there, perhaps he may have pity on me." Salih agreed to this, and they reached Yahya's house just as he had finished his prayers. The latter, seeing Mansúr's agitation and distress, asked the cause, and, when he heard it, promised to do what he could for him. Sending for his treasurer, he found that he had not enough money on hand, but by the help of his two sons, Jaafer and Fadhl, contrived to get together seven millions, promising the rest next day. Salih ibn Mehran explained that his orders were imperative, and that he must have the whole sum that day, or take the prisoner's head to the Caliph. When Jaafer heard this, he ordered a favourite slave girl of his to start off at once and borrow the amount from Fatima, Haroun's sister. The Princess, who was a very generously disposed woman, sent a valuable necklet, worth the sum asked for; and Yahya, having thus procured the ten million dirhems, sent them off by porters with Mansúr. The Caliph asked how the money had been procured, and, learning the particulars, commanded that it should be placed in the treasury, that

[1] Abu Jaafer Mansúr, the grandfather of Haroun Alraschid, and Caliph of the Abbaside dynasty, was so called because of his avaricious disposition.

Mansúr should be released, and that Yahya should be summoned before him. When Yahya came, he found Haroun Alraschid in a worse humour than before, and began to fear that his interposition in favour of Mansúr might have brought himself into trouble, but his wit and persuasive conversation soon so far softened the Caliph's heart that the Minister ventured to ask how Mansúr had fallen into disgrace. Haroun told him that it was partly because he suspected his loyalty, but chiefly because he had treated Yahya himself so badly—the very man who had now come forward to save him. The matter of the necklace was still a sore point, and Alraschid took it very ill that Yahya should have asked the Princess for such a thing. "Your Majesty," said the Minister, "when Allah sends trouble on a man, he will look anywhere for a way out of it!" Haroun laughed; but he sent for his sister, and reproached her bitterly for her share in the transaction. She merely answered "that she looked upon Yahya as a father, and could not be so unfilial as to refuse him so trifling a request." The Caliph was obliged to be content with this, and gave her back the necklace.

The crowd who had in the meantime collected about the palace gates were very much astonished to see both Mansúr and Yahya issue forth with their heads still upon their shoulders.

Nothing can show better than this incident the

noble character of the Barmecides, the avarice and despotic tyranny of their master, and the terrible insecurity of life and property under his reign.

A story told of the survivors of the unfortunate family illustrates the ingenious methods by which the Arabs of the day knew how to convey a covert reproach to their superiors, and shows Haroun's own quickness at detecting such remarks. A woman one day presented herself before the Caliph when he was surrounded by the most notable persons of his court, and addressed him thus—"O Commander of the Faithful! may Allah give repose to thine eye, and make thee rejoice in what He has given thee, for thou hast judged, and hast been just." "Who are you?" asked Alraschid. "I am a woman of the sons of Barmek," said she, "whose men you slew, and whose wealth you seized." The Caliph answered, "As for the men, they suffered what Allah decreed. As for their wealth, it has been restored to whence it came." Then turning to his courtiers, he asked, "Do you understand what this woman said?" "Nought but good," they answered. "Nay," said Haroun, "I do not think you quite understand her. When she said, 'May Allah give repose to thine eye,' she meant, literally, 'may it cease from motion'—that is, in blindness or death. When she said, 'May He make thee rejoice in what He has given thee,' she alluded to the words of the *Koran*—'And when they

rejoiced in what was given them, we punished them on a sudden!' (chap. vi., ver. 47). And when she said, 'Thou hast judged, and been just,' she used the last word in the sense of trespassing, in which it occurs in another passage, 'and as for the *trespassers*, they are fuel for hell!'" (chap. lxxii., ver. 15).

A talent for playing with the text of the *Koran* seems to have been inherent in the family of the Caliph. Ulaiyeh, one of his sisters, was a poetess of considerable talent, and used to celebrate in her verses a young page called Tell (Dew), for whom she had conceived a violent attachment; and Haroun, being informed of the circumstance, forbade her ever to mention the name of her lover again. One day he passed by her apartment, and overheard her reading the *Koran*. When she came to the verse, "A heavy shower falls on it, and it brings forth food twofold; and if no heavy shower falls on it, there falls the dew" (chap. ii., ver. 261), instead of pronouncing the last word, she read—"there falls—— what the Commander of the Faithful has forbidden me to mention!" Haroun laughed, and, entering the apartment, kissed her on the forehead and said, "Well, well, I will allow you Tell in future."

Ulaiyeh appears to have been on good terms with Zobeideh, the Caliph's chief wife, and on more than one occasion employed her musical and poetical talents for the purpose of reconciling the two, when,

as was too frequently the case, Haroun gave the princess cause for jealousy. Thus, finding herself neglected for the company of a new favourite, Zobeideh complained to her sister-in-law, who promised to win back her husband's affections for her. Having composed a pretty air, she adapted it to some appropriate words, and taught the whole of her own and Zobeideh's female attendants to sing it. Then dressing the girls in their most splendid garments, the two princesses, placing themselves at the head of the troop, rushed unexpectedly into the courtyard, where the Caliph was regaling himself, and burst out with one voice into the melody. Haroun's heart was touched; he started up to meet his wife, took her hand, and, placing her by his side, remained with her for the rest of the day, which he declared was the happiest he had ever passed.

An anecdote is extant of the introduction of Fadhl ibn Yahya, the Barmecide, into the apartments of the Princess Ulaiyeh, which, though having no particular point in it, throws some light on the domestic arrangements of the Court of Haroun Alraschid. I will give it in the words of El Fadhl himself, as related by a son of Jaafer's, who, when a little boy, overheard his uncle relating the circumstance to his grandfather.

"My father," said El Fadhl, "the Commander of the Faithful, took me by the hand, and led me through a chamber until we came to a room, the

door of which was locked. As soon as it was opened, he sent away the servants who were in attendance, and we went on until we reached another locked door, which the Caliph himself opened. This we passed through, and he locked it after us on the inside. We then went on to a corridor, and stopped at the door of an apartment from within which the sound of voices proceeded. Alraschid sat down by this door, and tapped it gently with his knuckles, on which we heard a rustling noise within, and a sweet voice suddenly burst forth in song to the sound of a lute, the melody being one of my own composing; I was so charmed and excited at hearing it, that I could have dashed my head against the wall. Then the air changed, and the person within the room sang an air of Ulaiyeh's, and the Caliph and I danced together to the tune. Then he said, 'Let us be off, or we shall make still greater fools of ourselves;' and we accordingly turned to depart. When we had reached the vestibule of the suite of apartments, Haroun seized me by the hand and said, 'Do you know who that woman was?' 'No, Commander of the Faithful!' I replied. He rejoined, 'I know that you will ask after her if I do not tell you, and so the matter will get abroad. Now I myself tell you that it was Ulaiyeh my sister, and, by Allah! if you breathe a word of this to anyone, I will assuredly kill you."

In the *Arabian Nights* stories, the Princess Zobeideh

plays a considerable part; she also appears in many of the anecdotes of Haroun Alraschid's reign which are found in other Arabic works. Very few of these are, however, suitable for reproduction here.

Zobeideh was, as I have before said, the cousin and principal wife of the Caliph, and appears to have exercised a much greater control over him than might have been expected, considering his violent temper and impatience of contradiction. She was also of a very jealous disposition, and often rated her imperial husband soundly for his numerous amours and frequent escapades.

It is related that Alraschid was one day in a very sullen and gloomy temper, when Abu Nawwâs came in, and endeavoured to cheer and amuse him, but without success. At last the jester remarked, "Why is the Commander of the Faithful so sad? By Allah! I never saw anyone so unjust to himself as your Majesty is. Why do you not enjoy the pleasures of this world and the next, both of which are within your grasp. As for the pleasures of the next world, they are to be had by charity to the poor and the orphan, by performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, by repairing mosques, by founding schools, and by improving the country, for all which things you will reap a rich reward. And as for the pleasures of this world, they are the enjoyment of delicious foods and drinks, and surrounding yourself with damsels, tall

or of middle height or short, sweet blondes or luscious brunettes, girls of Medina, or Hijáz, or Room, or Irak, in stature as straight as Samhari lances, with wits as keen as their forms are fair, and tongues as eloquent as their eyes are bright." And talking in this strain, Abu Nawwâs at length aroused the Caliph from his lethargy and departed. Presently Zobeideh entered the apartment, and by dint of cajoling and entreaty induced him to repeat to her all that Abu Nawwâs had said. "Did you not scold him," asked she, "for giving you such advice?" "Why should I scold him when the advice was so good?" was the reply; whereupon Zobeideh started up and left the room in a rage. Having reached her own palace, she summoned her slaves, and ordered them to follow Abu Nawwâs and give him a sound beating. The slaves obeyed, and going to Abu Nawwâs's house—where they found him in high spirits at the Caliph's having listened to him, and expectant of reward—fell upon him, and beat him so severely that, had not his women interfered and rescued him, he would have been killed. As it was, he was confined to his bed for some days with the injuries which he had received. Alraschid, who knew nothing of this transaction, at length sent for the poet, and Mesrúr, who brought the message, was much surprised at his condition, but, notwithstanding it, induced him to accompany him back to the palace.

Haroun received him very graciously, bade him sit down, and asked how it was that he had not seen him for so long. Now Abu Nawwâs had, upon his entry, remarked an open door with a curtain hanging before it, and some one moving behind it, whom he shrewdly conjectured to be the Princess Zobeideh. So he determined this time to be cautious, and replied that he had been ill. "I am sorry for it," said the Caliph. "By-the-bye, that was a capital discourse of yours the other day about the damsels. I should like to hear it again." "Yes," said Abu Nawwâs, "I was telling your Majesty that the Arabs derived the word *dharrah*, 'rival wife,' from *dharar*, 'harm,' and that their proverb has it, 'He who has two wives, lives the rest of his life in trouble and sorrow; and he who has three wives, his whole life is disturbed; and he who has four, may be reckoned as a dead man, though he be alive;' that is what I suggested to your Majesty; and I added that whosoever was content with one, finds in her honour and glory." Alraschid shouted out, "May I be quit of my religion, if I heard a word of the sort from you!" "Perhaps it may have slipped your Majesty's memory," said Abu Nawwâs, meekly; "but there is one thing which I wished to add, and that is, that the Beni Makhzúm[1] are, according to the Arab

[1] The branch of the Koreish to which Zobeideh belonged.

proverb, the flower of the Koreish tribe, and that you have espoused Casim's daughter Zobeideh, who is the flower of flowers and the joy of beholders, and that I saw from the expression of your Majesty's face that you were hankering after other maidens, and I wished to point out that this lady was the only one suitable for your Majesty." "Confound you!" said Haroun, furious; "do you mean to make me out a liar, O Abu Nawwâs?" "Do you wish to kill me before my time?" retorted the other, "or to lay me up again with nothing but my rage to console me?" At this a laugh was heard from behind the curtain, and a voice said, "You have spoken the truth, Abu Nawwâs; you never gave him any advice different to that which you have given him now; it was only his own loose ideas which distorted your words." "Yes, yes," said Abu Nawwâs; and, rising up hastily, hurried off home in a fright, lest he might have gone too far. However, when he arrived at his house, he was met by some servants of the Princess Zobeideh, who were bringing him a costly present. Whereupon he swore that he would never say another word that should cause the lady annoyance. Haroun was much amused when he learnt the whole truth, and consoled Abu Nawwâs for his beating with a present from himself as well.

Zobeideh never ceased to urge upon her husband the claims of her son Emín to the entire succession,

as belonging to the pure Hashemi race on both parents' side, and she was exceedingly jealous of Haroun's other son, Mamún, whom she hated not only as the child of a rival, but as having Persian blood in his veins, and more particularly because of the much more brilliant intellect which he displayed. This subject was the cause of many stormy scenes between the royal pair, several of which are related by the Arab historians on the authority of eye-witnesses. On one occasion, the story goes, the fond mother asserted that Emín was an excellent poet, and induced him to submit some of his verses to Abu Nawwâs's criticism. When the latter pointed out some gross violation of the rules of prosody in one of the lines, the young prince flew into a passion, and caused Abu Nawwâs to be imprisoned. Some time after, Haroun Alraschid sent for the poet, was surprised to learn of his incarceration and the reason of it, and severely reproved his son. Emín asked to be allowed to read some other verses in the presence of his father as well as of Abu Nawwâs, and the Caliph acceded to his request. As soon as Abu Nawwâs had heard the first few lines, he started up to leave the room. "Where are you going?" asked Haroun. "Back to prison!" was the reply. The character of Emín was indeed most frivolous and unstable, and one incident alone will show how unfit he was to govern. When, after Haroun's death,

war had broken out between the two brothers, the important town of Rhe, in Persia, had declared against him, and a messenger brought him news of the defeat of his armies, and the proclamation of Mamún as Caliph, he was fishing at the time, and merely remarked, "Do not trouble me; Kauther here has caught two fine fish, and I have not caught one!"

Another member of Haroun's family, his son, Abu 'Isá, by a foreign mother, was also a very talented singer. He died in the reign of Mamún, and one of the latter's courtiers—who was much attached to the deceased—when he heard of it, took off his turban and threw it upon the ground. Now it was the custom at the Court that, when a Caliph died, the mourners should remove their turbans—a thing to which no Mohammedan will consent at other times; Mamún, therefore, took the action ill, and said sarcastically, "Fate has interposed between you and your wish"—meaning that Abu 'Isá had not lived to succeed or supplant him himself. The other, with courtly sagacity, replied—"Commander of the Faithful, any misfortune that avoids you is easy to bear. Allah has been pleased this time to impose mourning on you, and not for you." Mamún was himself so affected by his brother's death, that he refused food for so long a time that his life was in danger.

The next anecdote exhibits in a very striking

manner the way in which poets and musicians were received at the Court of Bagdad. Isḥák ibn Ibrahim el Mosili, the celebrated singer and composer, was a great favourite with Haroun Alraschid. One day he sang a verse before the Caliph and his half-brother, Ibrahim ibn el Mehdi, when the latter, who himself laid some claim to musical talent, interrupted him by telling him that he was singing neither correctly nor sweetly, "You know nothing about the matter," said the musician; "try it yourself, and if you don't make a mistake in every verse from beginning to end, you may take my life!" Isḥák then turned to the Caliph, and said, "O Commander of the Faithful! this is my art, and my father's art; it is what has brought us near you, and placed us in your service, and caused us to tread upon your carpet; and if persons who know nothing of it wrangle with us about it, we cannot help speaking out our mind." "I don't blame you at all," said the Caliph, and left the room. As soon as he had gone, Ibrahim started up, and, coming towards Isḥák, exclaimed, "Dare you talk to me in that way, you nameless son of a slave-girl?" At this the singer's rage knew no bounds, and he screamed out, "You abuse me because you think I cannot answer you, because you are the son of a Caliph and the brother of a Caliph!—if it were not for that, I would call you the son of a slave-girl. Perhaps you think I dare not call you the son of a

slave-girl! but if I were to abuse you, it would only reflect on your uncle, El A'alam, who was a most respectable man, and a farrier!"[1] Thinking then that he had gone a little too far, Isḥák followed up this piece of abuse with another, deliberately devised, as he himself tells us, to produce an effect upon the Caliph when the incident should be reported to him. "I suppose," said he, "you think the Caliphate already belongs to you, and that you can frighten me as you do all the other friends of your brother, because you envy him and his sons the empire. But you are not strong enough to stand against them, and you are not strong enough to rule that empire. So you make light of their friends to give a vent to your wrath! But I trust Allah will never let the empire go out of the hands of Alraschid and his sons, and that he will kill you before it can! But if it should—which Allah forbid!—life has no more value for me, and I should prefer to die rather than live under you, so you can do with me then just as you please!" When Alraschid returned, Ibrahim jumped up, and, standing before him, said, "O Commander of the Faithful! this man has been abusing me, and has talked about my mother, and treated me with contumely." "What have you been saying?" asked the Caliph, angrily.

[1] Ibrahim was the son of Mehdi, Haroun's father, by one of the inferior wives; the mention of her family relations makes the taunt all the worse to the proud Abbaside prince.

"I do not know," said Ishák. "Ask those who were present." So Alraschid turned to Mesrúr and Honein, another attendant, and asked them what had passed between his brother and the musician. When he heard the words repeated, his face at first grew livid, and he absolutely foamed at the mouth with rage; but when the remarks about the Caliphate were mentioned, he seemed a little more composed, and, addressing himself to Ibrahim, said, "It was your own fault; you should not have abused him first; he only told you that he dared not answer you. So back to your place, and do not be guilty of such folly in future!" When the assembly broke up, he signed to Ishák to stay behind, which the latter did with no small apprehension. "Do you think," said Haroun, when they were alone together, "that I did not see the drift of your remarks? You made the same reproach three times to him that he had made to you. Do you think if Ibrahim beats you that I shall beat him in return? or do you imagine that, if he orders his servants to kill you, I shall take blood vengeance for you—when he is my own brother?" "O Commander of the Faithful!" said the poor singer, "you have killed me with those words; if he hears of them, he is sure to kill me! I expect he has heard them already!" Then the Caliph called for Mesrúr, and told him to send Ibrahim to him at once. Ishák, who was dismissed before the prince

came in, learned the particulars of the interview from one of the attendants. As his brother entered, Haroun began to reproach him for his folly, and said, "Do you treat with contumely my servant, and my companion, and the son of my companion, and make light of my kindness and that of my father to him, and this in my own court too, holding my court and Majesty up to ridicule? Ah! ah! ah! you attack this man and his fellows because you happen to be rich? Who forced you to contend with him, and to compete in music with one whose profession and livelihood it is? Then you think you can find fault with his art, while you know nothing whatever about it, till he obliges you to answer his arguments, and you cannot do so, and make yourself ridiculous, and display your ignorance, and ill breeding, and conceit! Now, by Allah! and by His prophet! and by my father's grave! if anybody harms him, or if a stone from heaven falls on him, or if he even falls off his horse, or if a roof falls on him, or if he drops down dead, I will kill you. By Allah, I will! by Allah, I will! by Allah, I will! And now be off." The poor prince went out crestfallen and half-dead with fear on hearing this outburst of rage. For some time afterwards, when Ibrahim and Isḥák were together in the Caliph's presence, the latter would look first at one and then at the other, and then burst out laughing. One day he said to his brother,

"I know you have really a liking for Ishák, and enjoy receiving lessons in music from him, and that he will not come to you until you have given him satisfaction—now give him a present, and treat him kindly, and recognise his merit, and if after that he annoys you, you may deal with him as you please with a long tongue and a heavy hand!" Then he turned to Ishák and said, "Do you go up and kiss the head of one who is your master and your master's son." Ishák complied, and so the feud between the prince and the singer was ended.

Ishák had been prohibited by the Caliph from singing to anyone but himself or his friend and vizier, Jaafer the Barmecide. On one occasion El Fadhl, Jaafer's brother, charmed with his singing and conversation, induced him by a bribe of a thousand dirhems to spend the evening at his house, and promised not to betray him. The news was, however, brought to Haroun, who was lying ill at Rakka at the time, and was exceedingly annoyed when he heard of it. He at once sent for Ishák, who, suspecting something was wrong, returned the money to El Fadhl, and when the Caliph reproached him with having disobeyed his orders, and entertained El Fadhl at Bagdad while his master was lying lonely and ill at Rakka, swore that he had only passed the evening in conversation, and had not sung a note. Alraschid was obliged to be content with this expla-

nation, and gave him a sum of money equivalent to that which he had returned.

Isḥák also relates that, being one day out hunting with the Caliph, the latter rode ahead, and he, feeling tired, made for a small convent which he observed close by, and asked for shelter. He was hospitably entertained by the prior, a venerable man, who set good meat and wine before him, and amused him with a recital of his own experiences, which extended back as far as the preceding dynasty of the Ommiades, several princes of which family had also been his guests. To complete Isḥák's satisfaction, he was waited upon at table by a clever and beautiful nun, and the time passed so rapidly that it was late in the evening before he returned to camp. The Caliph was angry at his absence, but hearing of his adventure, and some verses which he had improvised on the occasion, gave orders to delay their departure for another day, that he might himself visit the hospitable little Christian community. This he did the next morning, and was so charmed with his entertainment that he also remained the whole day, and, on taking his leave, made a present of a thousand dinars (nearly £500) to the monastery, and remitted the taxes on the lands and gardens belonging to it for seven years.

El Asmaí, another of the Caliph's literary friends, was a complete master of the Arabic language, and the most eminent of the authors, poets, and story-tellers

of the day. He was a native of Basra, but removed to Bagdad in the reign of Haroun Alraschid. Abu Nawwâs being told that he and Abu Obeidah, another accomplished scholar, were at court, replied, "As for Abu Obeidah, he will recite to them, if they will let him, all the history of the ancients, and the moderns too; but as for El Asmaí, he is a nightingale who will enchant them by his songs." It is said that he knew by heart sixteen thousand pieces of verse in one metre alone. Between him and this Abu Obeidah a rivalry existed, and he himself tells the following story:—"I and Abu Obeidah went one day to visit Fadhl ibn er Rabí, the minister, who asked me of how many volumes my work upon horses was composed. I answered him, 'of only one.' He then asked the same question of Abu Obeidah, who said his consisted of fifty volumes. 'Go over to that horse,' said the Vizier, 'and name the various parts of it.' 'I am no farrier,' he replied; 'but all that I have compiled on the subject was gleaned from the Arabs of the desert.' At a hint from Fadhl, I then went up, and laying my hand on each part of the animal in succession, named them, and recited an appropriate verse from some old Arab poet concerning each. When I had finished, he bade me keep the horse; and whenever I wished to annoy Abu Obeidah, I rode on that horse to pay him a visit."

El Asmaí, who had, as was usual with his class,

neglected to economise and provide for his old age, waited upon Haroun Alraschid for a long time after his accession, but was never fortunate enough to attract his attention. At length one day, as he was sitting disconsolate at the gate, almost determined to relinquish his hopes of the new Caliph's bounty and seek for a livelihood elsewhere, the door opened, and an attendant asked, "Is there anyone here who can make good poetry?" El Asmaí jumped up, and exclaimed, "I am the man for that." "Come, then," said the servant; "follow me into the palace, and if the Commander of the Faithful is only pleased with your verse, you may look upon this evening as the dawn of your fortunes!" The Caliph, who was sitting upon a sofa, with Jaafer the Barmecide beside him, acknowledged El Asmaí's salutation as he entered, and said to him kindly, "If you feel at all flurried or frightened, sit down and compose yourself before improvising anything." El Asmaí, fearing that such an opportunity might not occur again, explained that he was ready to exhibit his skill either as a poet or a reciter. After proposing some very difficult questions in literature, which the other answered promptly and correctly, Haroun asked him to recite a certain poem. This he at once began to do very glibly; but coming to a passage in which the previous and rival dynasty of the Ommiades was eulogised, he skilfully passed it over, and went on to another part of the ode which

contained a panegyric upon Haroun's own grandfather, Mansúr. "Did you leave the passage out on purpose," asked Alraschid, "or from forgetfulness?" "On purpose," said the poet; "I left out the lies about the Ommiades, and told the truth about Mansúr;" and was complimented on his courtier-like diplomacy. In his next recitation, which he performed very quickly, with a view to show his thorough familiarity with the old Arab literature, Jaafer interrupted him by saying, "Gently, gently! You need not be in such haste to depart; you will get paid for your trouble." "Since you have promised him payment," said the Caliph, "you must join me in the expense." "And I," replied El Asmaí, "will improvise you a contention for excellence between Arab and Persian, that the Caliph and his minister may contend as to which can give me the largest reward." A little later on, the poet was reciting some well-known verses which contain a long description of a camel, and Jaafer said, "Stop; cannot you find something better than a camel for us to talk about all night?" "It was that same camel," remarked Alraschid, sarcastically, "that took the crown from your heads and the kingdom from your monarchs!" alluding to the conquest of Persia, Jaafer's fatherland, by the Arabs, whose most typical possession is the camel. "Praise be to Allah!" said Jaafer; "I ask pardon." "You are

wrong again," said Haroun; "you should not say, 'Praise be to Allah!' when you are speaking of misfortunes, but rather, 'I ask aid of Allah!'"[1]

Another of the Court singers was Hishám ibn Suleiman, formerly a freedman of the Ommiade family, and a favourite with the last sovereigns of that dynasty. One day he sang before Haroun Alraschid, and so pleased the Caliph, that he gave him a costly necklace which he happened to have on at the time. No sooner had Hishám beheld the present than his eyes filled with tears, and when Haroun asked him to explain the cause, he related the following incident:—"As the Caliph Walíd was one day seated by the Lake of Tiberias, I approached, and found him surrounded by a company of very beautiful singing girls. Not recognising me, as I had my *litham*[2] over my face, he said—'Here comes a desert Arab; let us call him up and make fun of him.' So I joined the party, when one of the girls began to play and sing a song and air of my own composing, but made several mistakes in it, and I could not refrain from telling her that she was not singing correctly. At this she laughed, and, turning to El Walíd, said—'O Commander of the Faithful! do you hear what

[1] These and similar stereotyped formulæ are used to the present day in speaking Arabic. There is one for nearly every occurrence in life.

[2] A sort of veil worn by the Arabs, both for purposes of concealment and to protect themselves from the sun.

this desert Arab says?—he is finding fault with our singing.' At this the Caliph looked at me somewhat annoyed, but I explained the mistakes to him, and offered to sing the song myself. When I had finished, the girl jumped up and threw herself upon my neck, crying out, 'My master Hishám, by the Lord of the Ka'abeh!' I at once removed my veil, was recognised by the Caliph, and passed the remainder of the day with him. Presently, the barge approached to take them to the camp, but, before leaving, Walíd made me a handsome present, and the girl, having asked his permission, gave me this very necklace as a keepsake. The Caliph then embarked, one of the girls stepped in after him, and the other who had recognised me was about to follow, when her foot slipped; she fell into the water, and was never seen again. El Walíd wept grievously at her loss, and begged of me to let him have the necklace, for which he gave me a large sum of money in exchange. It was the memory of this incident that made me weep when I saw the necklace." Haroun Alraschid's only comment on the story was, "How marvellous is Allah's grace, that, while he has given me the throne of the Ommiades for an inheritance, he has given me their personal property too!"

This story bears the semblance of reality. Many of the narrations of personal adventures with which the courtiers entertained their master were, however,

evidently drawn from the resources of their own fertile imaginations. Some of those in the *Arabian Nights* are good specimens of this kind of improvised romance, and others are found scattered through works which pretend to greater historical accuracy, and are mixed up with the more authentic stories. One Obeid ibn el Abras, a poet, for instance, told Alraschid as a fact how, when once upon a pilgrimage to Mecca, the road of the caravan in which he was travelling was barred by a great dragon, whose roaring and threatening attitude forced them to choose another path. There they were met by a similar monster, and as no one else ventured to attack it and retreat was impossible, Obeid drew his sword, and, taking a *girbeh*, or water-skin, as a shield, advanced to the attack. The beast opened its mouth as if to swallow the intrepid Arab, when the latter pushed the water-skin into its mouth. To his astonishment, the dragon swallowed the water greedily, and went quietly off. On his return from Mecca, Obeid became benighted and lost his way, when a mysterious voice was heard bidding him mount a camel that stood beside him. He did so, and in a short time came in sight of the caravan. The camel then halted, Obeid dismounted, and the voice informed him that his guide was the dragon, grateful to him for having relieved his thirst. To people as superstitious as the Arabs, with whom a belief in *jinns*, or

genie, is an article of faith, and whose works on natural history contain minute and so-called scientific accounts of all the monsters of mediæval romance, this story may not have seemed so improbable. At any rate, it gained its narrator a large pecuniary reward.

Sometimes the story would turn upon some point of theological law, which was sure to interest the pious and learned Caliph, and to which the narrator would contrive to give a witty turn. El Asmaí once told Haroun that he knew a man who had divorced five wives in one day. "How is that possible," asked the Caliph, "when the law only allows him to have four?" El Asmaí said—"The man had four wives, and, coming home one day, found them all quarrelling together. 'How long am I to have this disturbance in my house? This is your doing,' said he, turning to one of his wives, 'and you are divorced!' 'You need not have divorced her in such a hurry,' said the second; 'you might have admonished her first!' 'And you are divorced too for interfering,' said the man. Then the third interposed, and abused him, saying that he had lost two good women. 'Then,' retorted he, 'I will lose a third; you are divorced too.' The fourth next struck in—'Cannot you manage your wives any way but by divorcing them?' asked she. 'No,' said the man; 'so you are divorced as well!' This moment a neigh-

bour's wife came in, and began to abuse him volubly for divorcing all his wives for nothing. Turning sharply to her, he said, 'If your husband would allow me, I would divorce you too, you chatterbox!' 'Oh,' said the husband, who now joined the party, 'you are quite welcome to do so.' So," said El Asmaí, "the man divorced five wives in one day."

The Cadi Abu Yúsuf, whose complaisant interpretation of the law I have before spoken of, was one day sent for to decide between Haroun Alraschid and his wife Zobeideh the weighty question which of two dishes was the best. The Cadi tasted first one and then another, and at length said, when he had nearly finished them both—"I never saw two claimants whose causes were so equally balanced. As soon as I have listened to one, the other brings an argument to overrule it."

One more specimen of the ready answers of the Arabs of the period.

Meeting an old woman in the desert in the course of his numerous pilgrimages to Mecca, Haroun asked her to what tribe she belonged. "To Taiy," was the reply. "Ah," said the Caliph. "How is it that your tribe cannot produce another Hátim?"[1] "How is it," retorted the politic old lady, "that the whole

[1] Hátim Taiy was an Arab who lived a few years before Mohammed, and was proverbial for his great liberality.

race of the Caliphs have never produced another like you?" The compliment gained her a rich reward.

Thus far my information has been exclusively taken from Oriental sources. European chronicles mention an embassy sent by Charlemagne to the court of the Caliph, and the interchange of presents and diplomatic courtesies between the two monarchs. As none of the Arabic histories even hint at this circumstance, and the tradition is entirely unsupported by collateral evidence, I am afraid it must be relegated to the ever-increasing category of exploded popular errors.

At a decisive or culminating point in a nation's history, the central figure will always form the focus of innumerable popular legends. Haroun Alraschid is no exception to the rule, and Arabic literature is full of stories in which the great Caliph plays a part, but many of which might as well have been attributed to any other person or time. From this mass of heterogeneous materials I have selected chiefly such anecdotes as have been handed down by trustworthy authority, such as bear upon themselves the stamp of truth, or such as obviously belong at least to the period of our history.

They are indeed the best and almost the only source from which information as to Alraschid's personality can be obtained, for the science of biography was almost unknown to the Arabs of the time, and even

when it was cultivated by them later on, it still retained its anecdotal form. Although I have refrained from inserting many of the time-honoured jokes and witticisms attributed to Alraschid and his merry companions, several of the foregoing stories may appear too frivolous for a serious historical work. I would, however, remind the reader that beneath the trivial exterior of these tales there lies much that is true, and they certainly reflect faithfully Arab society as it existed under the Caliphs of Bagdad. They show us the subject of our history as he lived and thought and spoke, and throw a much stronger light upon his personal character than any of the records of his public acts.

I must now take leave of Haroun Alraschid; I have endeavoured to bring him out of the dim mists of fable into the clear daylight of history. If, now that we know him better, we must deny him the time-honoured title of "the Good," we can scarcely study his chequered youth, his glorious reign, and his miserable end, without allowing him that of "the Great."

He was a man of great talents, keen intellect, and strong will. Had he been born in a humbler position, he might have done something for the good of his country and the world at large, and would certainly even then have attained to eminence.

The eloquence and impetuosity of his discourse, as

shown in those speeches of his which have been preserved, were remarkable even for a time when eloquence was cultivated and regarded as the greatest accomplishment. That these speeches are genuine is proved by the fact that, though related by different persons, the style is identical in them all, and they are of so remarkable a character, that even now they linger in the memory of anyone who reads them once in the original; and at the time they were uttered, with the tragic circumstances that for the most part surrounded them, they must have fixed themselves indelibly upon the hearers' minds, and could scarcely have been repeated otherwise than faithfully.

As a man, he showed many indications of a loyal and affectionate disposition, but the preposterous position in which he was placed almost necessarily crushed all really human feelings in him. It must not be forgotten that he inherited what was practically the empire of the civilised world; that he was the recognised successor and kinsman of God's own vicegerent on earth; that he was the head of the Faith; that, in a word, there was not, and could not be, a more grand, important, or worshipful being in the world than himself. Nor was this merely instilled into his mind by servile courtiers; it was the deliberate conviction of the whole Moslem world—that is to say, of the world at large—for no Moslem then, and

few Moslems now, would regard an infidel as even deserving the name of one of God's creatures. That such a man should not be spoilt, that such absolute despotism should not lead to acts of arbitrary injustice, that such unlimited power and absence of all feelings of responsibility could be possessed without unlimited indulgence, was not in the nature of human events. He was spoilt, he was a bloodthirsty despot, he was a debauchee; but he was also an energetic ruler, he humbly performed the duties of his religion, and he strove his utmost to increase, or at least preserve intact, the glorious inheritance that had been handed down to him. If, in carrying out any of these views, a subject's life were lost or an enemy's country devastated, he thought no more of it than does the owner of a palace who bids his menials sweep away a spider's web. When he could shake off his imperial cares, he was a genial, even an amusing companion, and all around him liked him, although such as ventured to sport with him did so with the sword of the executioner suspended above their heads.

The subsequent history of the Caliphate is a sad story of civil war, invasion, and decadence. Under Haroun's son, Mamún, it is true the lustre of its glory was scarcely dimmed; for, although the limits of the Empire were already contracted, and its power restricted, the impulse which that enlightened

monarch gave to literature and science, by encouraging the translation of the great works of antiquity from Sanscrit, Zend, and Greek into his own native language, must make his reign gratefully remembered by the civilised world. With his successors it was far different; the vices of luxury, indolence, and cruelty were indulged in by them to an unlimited extent, and entailed their necessary fatal consequence, until at length El Motawukkel, the last of the Caliphs, was carried by the Ottoman Sultan, Selim, a prisoner from Egypt—where he still possessed the shadow of at least spiritual authority—to Constantinople, and was forced to surrender even his empty title to the conqueror. The religion which Mohammed taught, and which the early Caliphs, his successors, disseminated so widely, has ever since gained ground; but the domination of El Islam as a consolidated temporal power virtually ceased with the decadence of the imperial city of Bagdad, the glories of which are inseparably connected with the name of Haroun Alraschid.

GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE HOUSES OF OMMAIYEH, ABBAS, & ALI.

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